OVEMBER 1996

PRICE: HK$38

China

TOURISM

Soothing Suzhou

Touring Guilin – by Bicycle

Sichuan-Tibet Highway Scenery

Sea Gull Watching

196

ISSN 1025-577X

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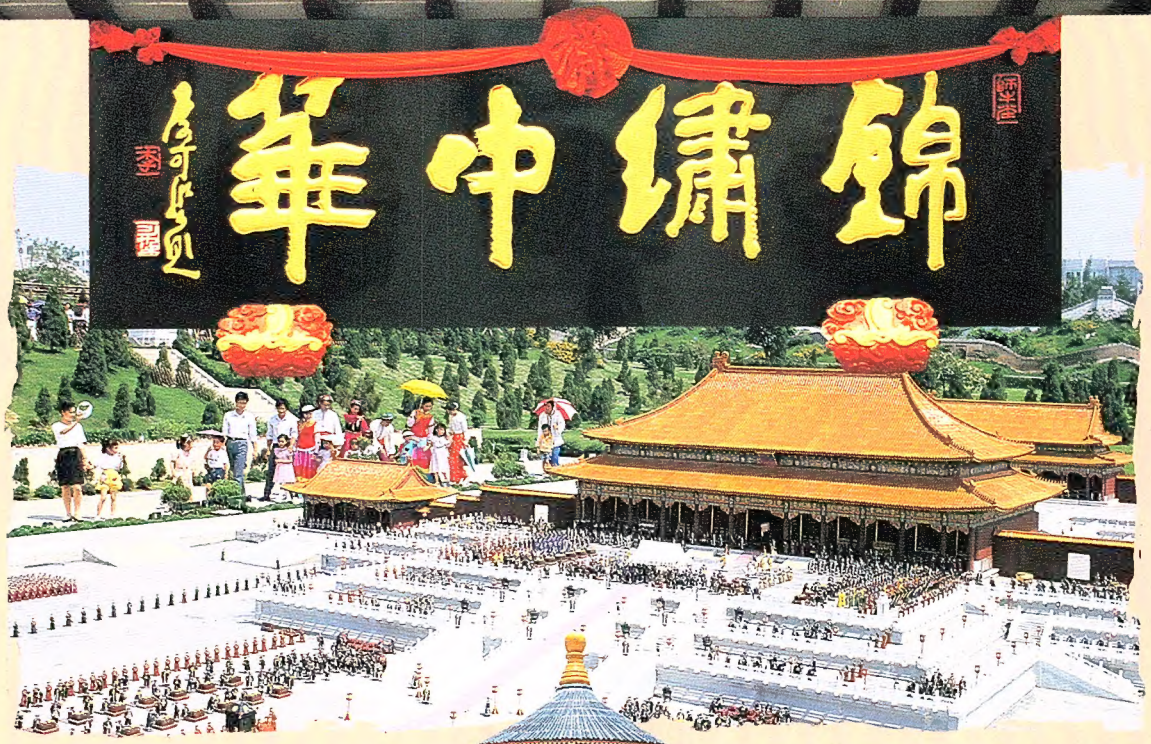

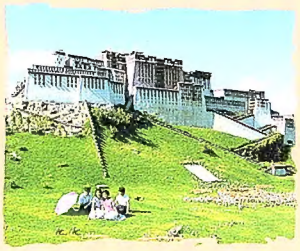

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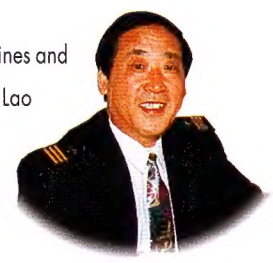

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We introduce to you five routes around the outskirts of Guilin. Following them, you can pedal through beautiful landscapes, visit ancient towns as well as experience the unique rural life.

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Situated at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsular, Dalian faces both the Yellow Sea and the Bohai Sea. Its 30-km coast provides abundant tourist resources.

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Photos and Article by Huang Yanhong

Every July the Yi people of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture hold various activities to celebrate their Touch Festival. Enjoying themselves with singing and dancing, they have a saying, "Only an ox does not know how to dance, only a piece of wood does not know how to sing."

LEISURE

What a Wonderful World 78

Photos by Shi Baoxiu Article by Matthew Kwok

An overseas Chinese going to Kunming on a business trip was amazed by the sea gulls seeking winter shelter there. He was so overwhelmed by these lovely birds that he could not help writing to his sweetheart so that she too could share his enchanting experience.

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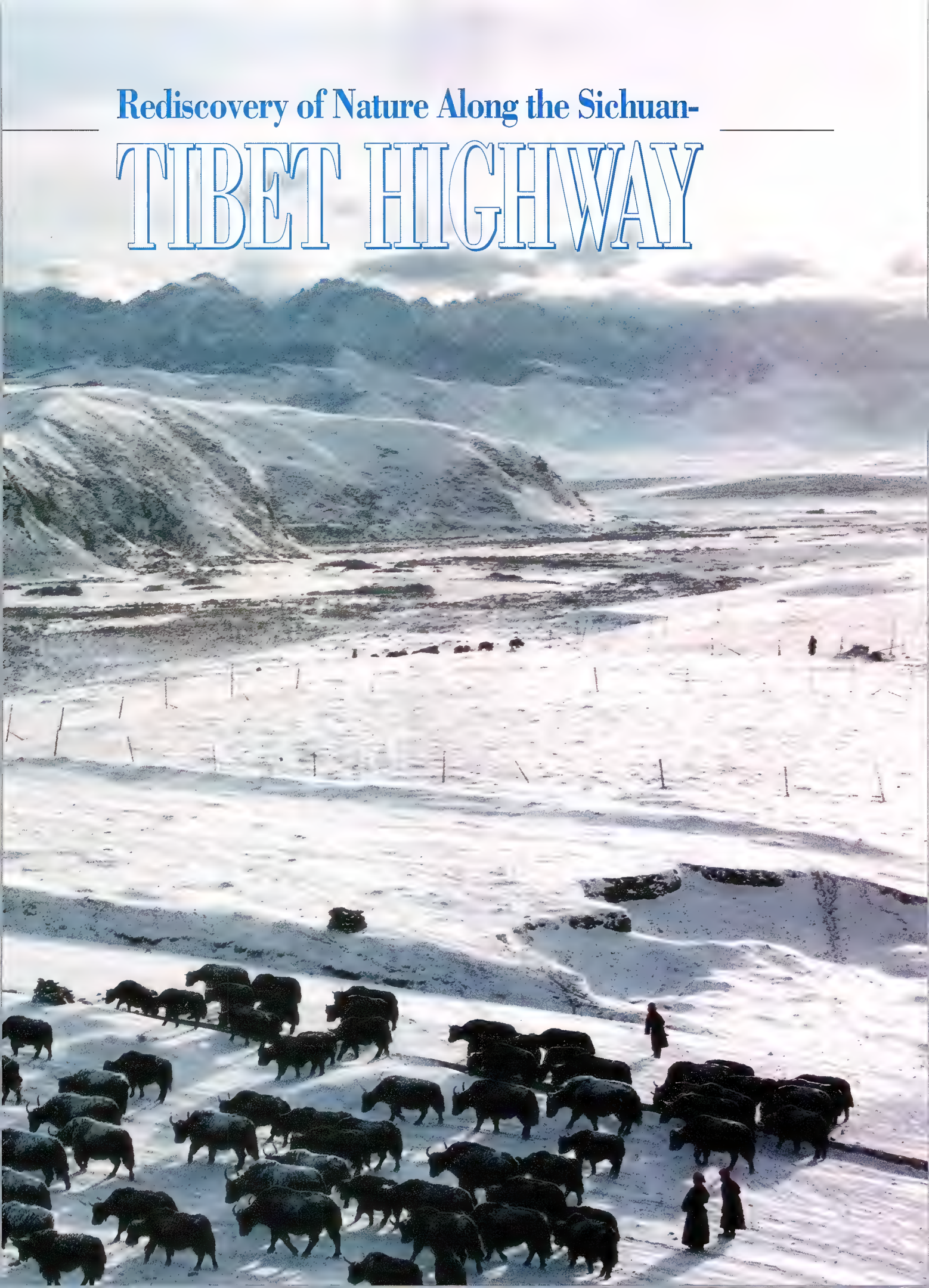
Xie Guanghui

Front Cover: A dwelling in Suzhou

LANDSCAPES

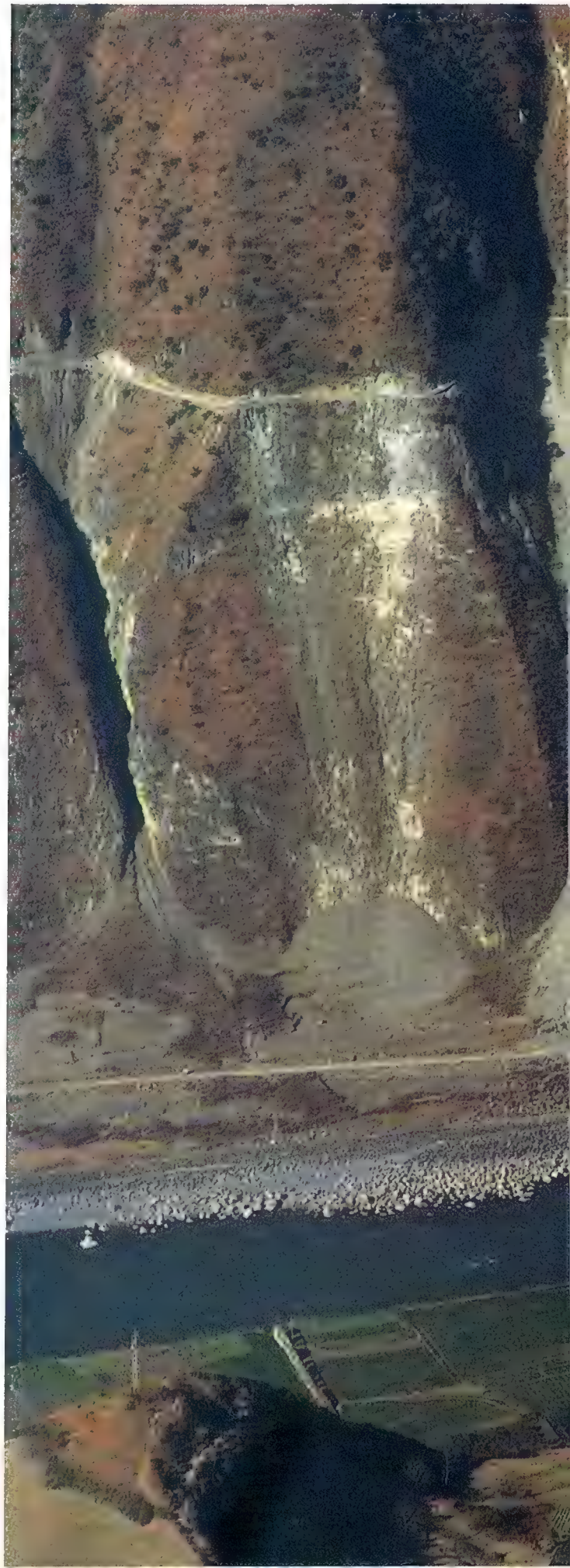
Rediscovery of Nature Along the Sichuan-

TIBET HIGHWAY



My passion for roving stirred with the autumn breeze; the mere thought of rolling countryside dyed the colour of ripened pomegranates, and of pastureland stretching for miles towards snow-crested mountains, made me itch to be on my way. I had heard many stories about the rugged, uninhibited beauty of the landscape along the Sichuan-Tibet Highway, so I hired a truck and driver, and set out on a journey with the intention of getting lost in the embrace of Mother Nature. We left Chengdu in the morning to arrive in the town of Kangding by evening. That night sleep eluded me despite my fatigue – the experience of the day was just too thrilling to be forgotten. As our truck had nosed its way up a stretch of hair-raising switchbacks, it had seemed to me that danger lurked on all sides. The wrecks of two trucks lay eerily at the bottom of a ravine, as if warning the wayfarer with their own sad experience. Early the next morning we drove through a pass more than 4,000 metres above sea level on top of the Zheduo Mountain. Our route took us past the villages of Tigru, Gnuzezom and Qoinyiba. After making a turn at Wazug, we sped alongside the Luqu River and soon reached Xinduqiao Town situated at a rather busy intersection of two highways. After a brief pause in town, we resumed our journey by swinging onto the northern branch of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. The stretch of highway between the Zheduo Mountain and the Targong Grassland, with Xinduqiao Town at its centre, was something of a scenic corridor typical of western China. Perhaps

Previous page: Winter on the Tagong Prairie (by Ran Yujie)
Upper: A highway near Tagong (by Huang Yanhong)
Right: "Scarred" cliffs above Dadu River (by Huang Yanhong)

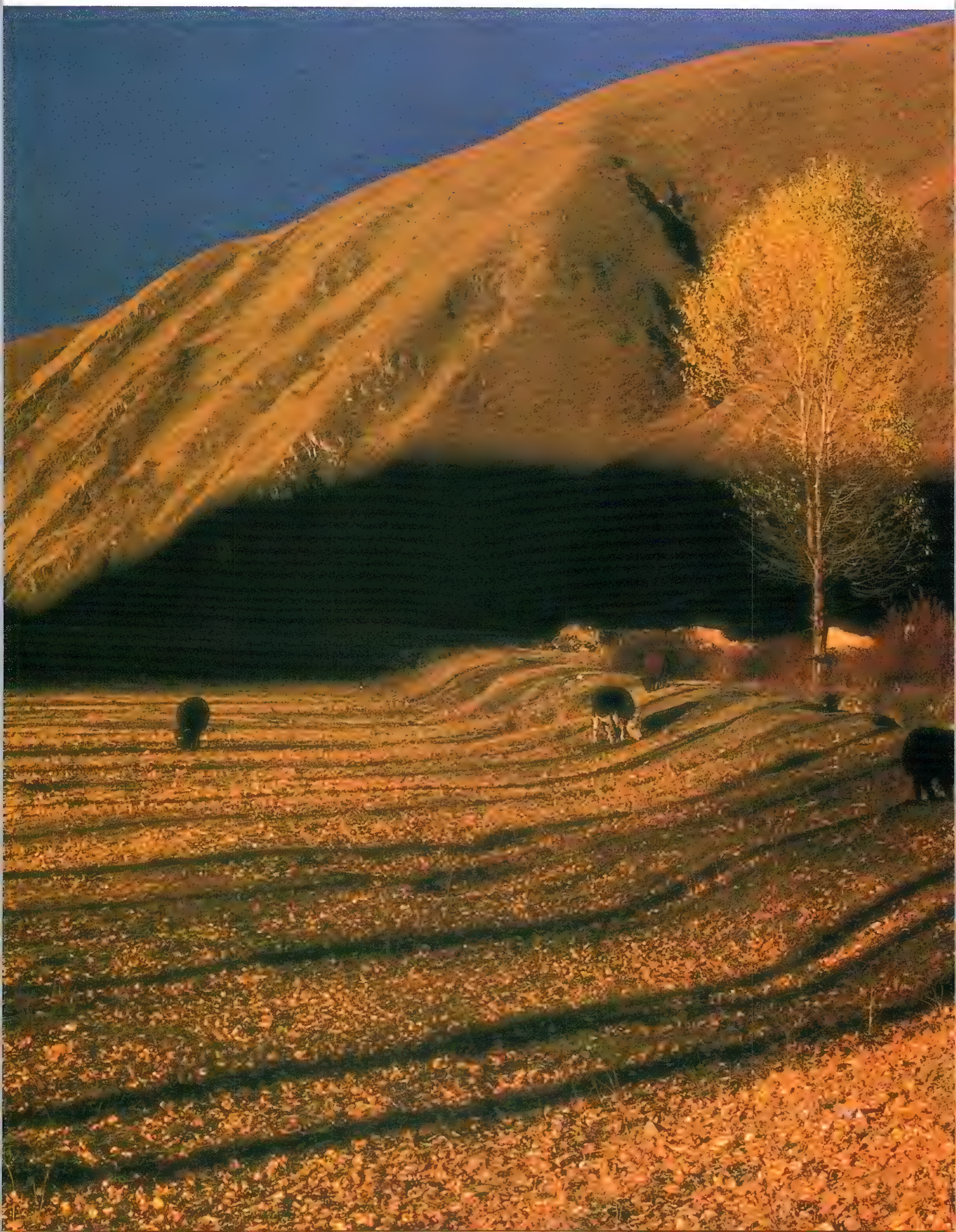


its mountains are a shade less than breathtaking, its rivers may be devoid of rapids, and verdant forests may be non-existent, yet its peculiar topography allows the sun to play such magical work on everything that mountain ranges, villages, brooks, Buddhist pagodas, white poplar trees appear embroidered into an tapestry so appealing and in such immense proportions. ◨ Having driven for approximately 40 kilometres from Xinduqiao, we arrived at Targong, which in the Tibetan language means "a place loved by Buddha". Obviously Buddha had chosen well, for against the backdrop of a blue smudge of snowy mountains Targong brims with a vitality formed by its monasteries, pastures and trade fairs. ◨ We left the Targong Temple, a renowned landmark surrounded by a forest of stupas, and drove up the highway to a slope which opened onto a vast expanse of grassland. It was autumn, and the grass had turned into a downy yellow. On the side of the mountain we saw a white pagoda surrounded by a cluster of sutra streamers fluttering in the breeze and seemingly beckoning pilgrims from afar. The Haizi Mountain is the venue of an annual horse-racing competition held in summer. ◨ As my companion clicked away with his camera, I lay on the grassland and felt man's intimate attachment to the greatness of nature. I listened to the humming of the wind, watched cottony clouds racing across an azure sky and at that moment all the failures and trepidations of the mundane world diminished into nothingness. It suddenly drove home to me why it is believed that the best cure for those who feel frustrated with life is heading off into the mountains to seek out Mother Nature. ◘

Upper: Sunset on Luqu River (by Huang Yanhong)
Right: The first snow on the plateau (by Huang Yanhong)

Traveller's Tips The Sichuan-Tibet Highway refers to the stretch of road from Ya'an in Sichuan to Lhasa in Tibet. At east Guro, near Xinduqiao, the highway forks out into southern and northern branches which meet again at Qamdo, before stretching out to Lhasa. Shortly after the highway swings away from Ya'an, it winds its way up the Erlang Mountain in a series of breathtaking hairpins with the magnificent Gonggar, the tallest mountain in Sichuan, hovering on the horizon. Beyond the mountains the highway runs parallel with the Dadu River, passing by the famed Luding Bridge, plunging into the Wasi Gulley to reach Kangding (Dardo). Then, having climbed over the Zheduo Mountain, the highway meanders its way through an area noted for its typical western Chinese scenery. It takes one day to cover the 360 kilometres from Chengdu to Kangding; or stop over in Luding County. Xinduqiao (80 kilometres from Kangding) operates guesthouses for only ten yuan per night. Travelling further, Baimai, Dawu and Garze offer tiny inns. It takes a minimum of four days to cover the entire length of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway. October is the best time to visit. Buses for Kangding leave Chengdu daily from the Xinnanmen Bus Station. Bus services are also available from Kangding to Xinduqiao, Targong and other destinations; these are direct, non-stop lines, so if you want to stop and take pictures, hire a cross-country jeep (500-1,000 yuan per day, driver and gasoline included).

Right: The land bathed in sunlight (by Chen Jin)
Next page: Going home (by Huang Yanhong)



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Taste the Rich Flavours of Simplicity

One sentence sums up this issue: "From plainness, one can find 100 flavours."

What a discovery! There is even a kind of philosophy and profoundness behind it.

In fact, the saying is just an expression of the Suzhou people's taste for food. However, it also reflects their expectation of life. They eat plainly and prefer to live a simple and ordinary life. They do everything, including walking, at a carefree pace, and when they talk, their tones are as sweet and soft as rosefinch. To them, the most appreciated entertainment is to hide oneself in a corner of a garden to read a book while sipping from one's tea cup. Theirs is a life as enjoyable as any immortal.

The landscapes of Guilin are also rich with Chinese cultural flavours. Before setting off for Guilin, our correspondent Shi Baoxiu, a statuesque 1.83 metres, said, "No doubt I'll get a chance to loose some weight." What he said turned out to be true. Having fulfilled his assignment of designing five safe, practical cycling routes for our readers, he lost ten ponds. However, he found the most appreciable aspect of this trip is simplicity: Whenever he became exhausted, he simply lay on the grass, munching away at freshly picked fruit while contemplating the clouds. Besides the beautiful landscapes of Guilin, he also tasted the simple country life of the local people.

Nevertheless, most of the people living in cities spend their day catching buses, snacking on fast food and busying themselves with all kinds of trifles, and are unable to enjoy the leisure of Suzhou and Guilin.

However, you can make up for it by finding leisure during a tourist trip. Try to taste simplicity by ridding yourself of busy hectic schedules.

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SEEING GREATER GUILIN ON A BIKE

HIGHLIGHTS

How large is Greater Guilin?

What's the best way to sight see?

Can one do it leisurely on a bicycle?

There are five routes to choose from. Our reporter decided first to make a scouting trip up to Qifeng (Strange Peak), then went underground to explore the karst caves of Guanyan. Route 2 took him to the towns of Fuli and Xingping. Route 3 offered close-up views of lush green fields and huge banyan trees. Heading southward on Route 4, he was a guest at a village inhabited by the Yao ethnic people. Finally, he headed north for Ziyuan, sailing along the Zijiang River to climb on the "Back of the Dragon" at Longji.

"Cycling along the mountain paths wasn't exactly always leisurely, but it certainly was an excellent way to take in the idyllic beauty of Greater Guilin's magnificent landscape in one fell swoop. I was also able to witness the simple, rustic life and customs of some of the ancient towns and mountain villages along the way. Plus, it was a good value seven-day tour, paying only six yuan rental per day for my bicycle." said he.

— The Editor

Photos & Article by Shi Baoxiu

Translated by Zhang Qingnian

Ling Yuan

資

天門
Tianmen

浪田
Langtian

風帆石
Fengfan Rock

江

資源
Ziyuan

Zijiang River

越城嶺
Yuecheng Ridge

Route 5 :

■ Chinese tourists enjoy Yao-style food at a restaurant in Langtian.

Route 1 :

■ The calligrapher and his wife tour Qifeng to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

桂林
Guilin

漓

奇峰鎮
Qifeng

冠巖
Guanyan Rock

竹江碼頭
Zhujiang Pier

興坪鎮
Xingping Town

Route 2 :

■ Japanese tourist Fusako Seki travelling between Fuli and Xingping by bicycle

Route 3 :

■ Touring between the ancient banyan tree and the Moon Mountain.

陽朔
Yangshuo

福利鎮
Fuli Town

古榕樹
Ancient banyan tree

書僮山
Mt. Shutong

月亮山
Moon Mountain

Lijiang River

江

荔浦
Lipu

豐魚巖
Fengyu Rock

Route 4 :

■ Tourists from Hong Kong riding on an ox cart

旅遊路線 Tourist route

鎮 Town

市 City

山 Mountain

縣 County

碼頭 Pier

• Route One •

Qifeng Town, Guanyan Caves

Base: *Guilin City*

Distance: *Approximately 15 km each way, leaving by bicycle and returning by mini-bus; by boat it is approximately a 22-km round-trip.*

Food and drink: *Easily available along the route so there is no need to bring your own.*

Degree of difficulty: *Average*

It takes about an hour to cycle from Guilin to Qigeng.

I grabbed my knapsack and went down to the hotel lobby where I found Xiao Jin from the Guilin Tourism Bureau, along with a young couple, ready and waiting to leave. First, I needed to rent a bicycle; fortunately, there was a woman not far from the hotel who rented them for only six yuan a day plus a deposit of 200 yuan. Not bad at all! I picked out one which was well-used but appeared to be working well.

Soon, the four of us were cycling southward along Zhongshan Road, past Nanxi Hill and through a rather quiet street. Before we knew it, we were out into the open countryside. That's how big Guilin city proper is.

This is the same road that takes one to Guilin airport. It is very wide and well-paved, ideal for cycling. Refreshed by the spring breeze, I got talking to the young couple. They were both from Hunan Province and had come to Guilin two years ago to try their luck and happily they were both doing quite well. The young man is a calligrapher, he can not only write with either hand, but also with his mouth!

Once they learned of our planned trip to Qifeng, they eagerly asked if they could join us. I was concerned that the long-distance cycling would be too tiring for them, but they said they looked forward to the opportunity to exercise their muscles and enjoy the scenery at the same time.

Mid way, the road split in two with one section branching off to the airport. Riding straight on we took the other. The air became cooler. In the distance we saw a range of undulating mountains veiled by a mist, like a beautiful maiden vaguely visible behind a thin gauze. We felt a big gust of wind and instantly knew the rain was coming; we raced ahead until we came to a small roadside inn where we took shelter under a matted roof. On the wall were three huge characters: "san yuan bao" meaning "a full meal for three yuan". How was that possible? I went inside the kitchen to inquire. Indeed it was true! A bowl of Guilin rice noodles with meat, plus a dish of Guilin preserved vegetables and a bowl of rice porridge all for three yuan. No wonder they had so many customers. The owner certainly knew how to do business!

As soon as the rain stopped, we were on our way again, splashing through pools of water. In 20 minutes we were in Qifeng Town.

Leaving behind the muddy lane, we were immediately greeted by a magnificent forest of solitary peaks rising out of the vast open fields.

Chen Yat Nin

The underground river in Guanyan Cave

Primary students visiting Guanyan Cave during their spring break

Slender and upright, the peaks were covered with green trees. Jin told us that not so many tourists know of this place, but photographers who do, frequent the area all year round in order to capture the beauty of the peaks in all four seasons. Particularly enchanting, apparently, is the view in early morning in wintertime when the peaks are shrouded by a freezing mist, their silhouette appearing drowsily from behind the blurred, white vapours.

Planted right in the midst of the fields and among the farmers, it is totally free from any kind of human sophistication. How tragic it would be if one day people started building pavilions and bridges here or mutilating the rocks by carving inscriptions of famous personages on them.

After leaving Qifeng Town, we took to the highway. The young couple headed home for Guilin while Jin and I continued our journey southward. The hill slopes on either side were covered with orange trees, including the famous Guilin "Golden Coin Orange" or "Jinju". Unfortunately for us, the trees were only in flower, too early to be able to taste the fruit. For that, we would have to wait until the autumn!

Yunwu Mountain Villa in Guanyan Rock is an ideal place to stay during your holiday.

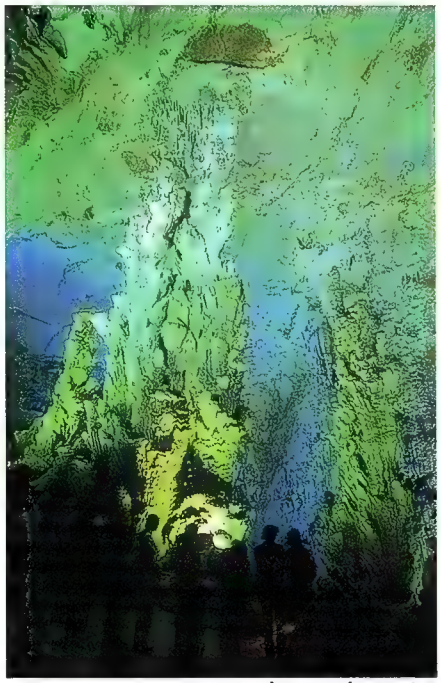
After about an hour's cycling we reached Zhujiang Wharf. A row of boats lined up at the dock waiting to take tourists on the Lijiang River cruise. Passengers boarded the boats and as soon as one was full it would blow its whistle three or four times and then turn to sail down river.

Jin pointed to a minibus on the opposite bank which would take us directly to the Guanyan Cave, as 30 kilometres was a bit too far to cycle. But, before I could reply, the bus moved off. Jin wasn't worried, he said going by boat would be even better. By a stroke of luck, there were still some seats available on the boat which would dock at Guanyan. It cost 30 yuan per person.

It was wonderful to be able to rest our legs after the continuous pedaling. From our seats in the cabin, we leisurely watched the lovely peaks unfold before our eyes. In less than an hour, the boat docked at Guanyan. We parked our bikes at the wharf and descended into the karst caves.

These caverns have even more to offer than those at Ludi and Qixing on Guilin's outskirts. They are very deep and extremely spacious. Miraculously, Nature had dug out the inside of the hill. Several man-made and natural tunnels wound through the belly of the hill on different levels and in every direction. Without a guide and the signs, one might easily not be able to find one's way out for days.

At one point, there is a one-kilometre-long gorge along which an underground railway has been built. Chugging through the dimly lit gorge in the open cars, I had the feeling of exploring the centre of the earth!



Guanyan Cave, newly opened to tourists

Getting off the train, we boarded a boat to explore an underground river. The water was deep and rapid. There was nothing to light the way except for the battery lamp at the front of the boat which only managed to light up a few feet of the cave walls. A saying sprung to mind: "When out on the waters, you are no longer your own master." What better description of our predicament could be found!

Suddenly, light appeared ahead. The river branched out and the boat docked by an open piece of land. I quickly jumped onto solid ground. We then took an elevator which brought us to the exit halfway up the hilltop in less than a minute.

At the foot of the hill lay Caoping Township with the Lijiang River meandering through it, inlaid with countless, shimmering paddy fields.

In the afternoon, we took a boat ride back to Zhujiang Pier and then took a minibus to go back to Guilin.

The spring fog adds an extra dimension of colour to the peaks.

The old town of Xingping

記者實際走過的路線
reporter's route

餐飲及修車處
restaurant and repair shop

碼頭
pier

• Route Two •

Fuli and Xingping

Base: *Yangshuo*

Distance: *By boat from Yangshuo to Fuli, approximately 10 km; by bike from Fuli to Xingping, 8 km; and 30 km returning to base by boat.*

Food and drink: *Easily available along the way, no need to bring your own.*

Degree of difficulty: *There is one stretch of pretty rough mountain road, expect to sweat a lot.*

Xiao Jin was to join me two days later as he had work to finish at the Tourism Bureau.

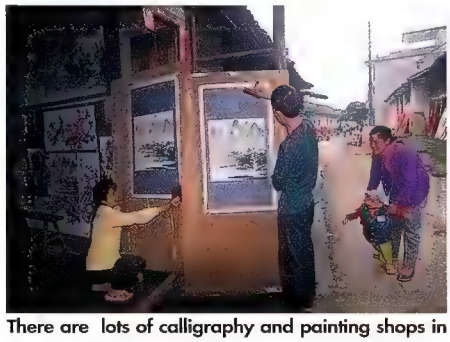
From Guilin Railway Station, I took a minibus to Yangshuo and easily found a room at the Jinlong (Golden Dragon) Hotel for 80 yuan a night.

Early the next morning I hopped onto the mountain bike I had rented the previous evening, and dashed towards the Yangshuo Pier.

Along the river embankment, people were doing their morning exercises. There was not a single boat on the river. The boat owners had obviously just got out of bed and were washing by the water's edge. I looked at my watch: five minutes past seven, far too early. There was not another visitor in sight. Would they make a trip just for me?

A middle-aged man emerged from his boat, smiling broadly. I said I wanted to go to Fuli Town. The man said, "You're too early. Visitors usually leave around 10. But no matter. Since I have to wait any way, I might as well make this trip for you for 60 yuan, how's that?" A 10-kilometre trip on a 16-seat pleasure boat all to myself – not a bad deal! I swiftly carried my bicycle on board and climbed onto the upper deck for a better view. I sat there like a "big shot" on an inspection tour of the river.

The scenery from Yangshuo to the town of Fuli had an elegance which was quite moving. Lijiang River became wider, more tranquil, and the water even more transparent. Groves of bamboo lined the banks and while the peaks might not be as tall as those near Guilin, they appeared to be more graceful. Silhouetted against the back-lighting of the morning sun, the mist-shrouded peaks displayed a unique charm and the mist settled on the water looked like a white blanket. The chugging of a motor announced an approaching boat from the opposite direction, but it was quite a while before it came into sight. When its passengers saw me, they waved and shouted "Hello there!" It was no surprise that they should feel excitement meeting another solitary boat, in the early hours of the morning.



There are lots of calligraphy and painting shops in Fuli Town.

By the time the mist and clouds dispersed, the boat had docked at Fuli Town. I said good-bye to the boat owner and went ashore. After passing under a stone gateway, I started pedalling slowly down the only street of this ancient town. There were all kinds of shops lining the twisting stone-slab street. Many were age-old stores selling paper fans which were extraordinarily large, opening out to measure nearly two metres from one end to the other. Most of them were decorated with painted landscapes of Guilin and Yangshuo. The shops selling Chinese paintings were hung with numerous scrolls, mostly of landscapes, but also of flowers, birds, ancient beauties and the popular legendary figure Zhongkui, who supposedly drives away ghosts and evil spirits. Prices were very low indeed, a small painting sold for only 30 yuan. This town must have strong cultural origins since ancient times.

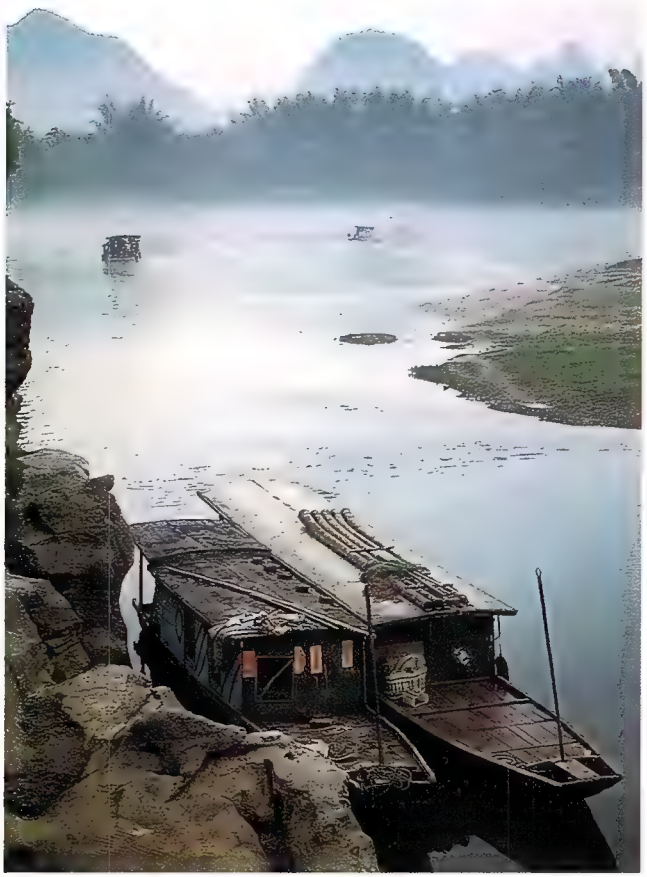
Fusako Seki visiting a village

Once outside Fuli, I was on the road leading to Xingping Town. I adjusted the speed of my mountain bike, then shot forward with the wind whistling past my ears and the square paddies on either side whizzing

past. Oh, what fun it was flying through the countryside on a bicycle! Unique mountain peaks popped up from the watery fields and farmhouses appeared nestled at the foot of the mountains, smoke curling up from their chimneys. Every now and then, the sound of chickens and barking dogs came from the villages, or the laughter of children.

After cycling for 10 kilometres, I reached Qiaotoupu. I had not eaten a scrap of food since early morning, so I sat down at one of the cleaner snack shops and feasted on two bowls of rice noodles for three yuan. I bought two bottles of mineral water from a nearby store and set out again.

I was just about to mount my bike when I caught sight of a woman struggling with the chain of her bicycle. The sweat pouring down her face, her hands were full of grease. She looked Japanese and I was proven



The scenery outside Fuli Town creates the perfect picture.

right – she started speaking very fast in Japanese. Despite the language barrier I managed to understand, it was obvious enough that she was having trouble with her bicycle. Luckily, it was nothing serious and I was able to help. It was just a matter of putting the loosened chain back into place. When she saw the bike was okay again, she kept repeating "arigato", Japanese for "thank you". When I had washed my hands in the roadside stream, she took out a notebook and wrote down several lines and passed it to me. Her name was Fusako Seki and she was a graduate of Tokyo University now studying for her doctor-of-law degree at the graduate school of the University of Hokkaido.

She then drew a map of her itinerary: Japan to Hong Kong, to Guangzhou, to Guilin, to Yangshuo, then back to Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Japan. She wrote that she liked very much the enchanting landscape of Yangshuo. Even more she enjoyed cycling through the mountains and along the rivers. She had to rush back to Guilin that evening to catch the plane for Guangzhou. I then wrote: "Time is pressing. We had better hurry."

This basket is used for catching fish.

The route from Qiaotoupu to Xingping Town was mostly along undulating mountain paths. Furthermore, it was hot under the midday sun. My T-shirt was drenched through with sweat. It took us one and half hours to cover the eight kilometres and it was two in the afternoon when we arrived at our destination.

The town was not at all like the ancient, plain features of Fuli. The streets were wide and cement paved. The old stores had been torn down, giving way to new semi-modern buildings. Even the Xingping Hotel on the bank of Lijiang River is no more. Situated right on the river it used to leave guests with such wonderful memories even though they only stayed there for one night. A new modern building was being constructed on the site.

Carrying our bicycles, Fusako and I boarded a wooden ferry boat to a fishermen's village on the opposite bank. The fishermen here usually fished at night by lamplight and with the help of cormorants. With nothing to do during the day, they gather outside the waterside stores and play cards, yelling and shouting and making lots of noise. Fusako particularly appreciated the lifestyle and customs of these ordinary folk and took several photographs.

At four p.m. we took a pleasure boat down river and floated to Yangshuo. The scenery along this section can in no way compare with that at Yangdi and Fuli, but we enjoyed the relief of being able to stretch our legs and avoid cycling back along the same route.

As soon as we reached Yangshuo, Fusako jumped onto a minibus and headed for Guilin. I went back to the Golden Dragon Hotel. Waiting in the lobby was Xiao Jin. He had just arrived from Guilin and tomorrow had a trip planned to Gaotian and its vicinity. Apparently, we were to be joined by a third person who would arrive shortly.

We put our bikes on board the boat and return to Yangshuo.

Chen Yat Nin

Foreign tourists visiting a traditional Chinese street in Yangshuo.

Cleaning our bikes beside Jinbao River.

記者實際走過的路線
reporter's route

☆ 餐飲及修車處
restaurant and repair shop

• Route Three •

Gaotian, Ancient Banyan Tree, Jinbao Village, Moon Mountain.

Base: *Yangshuo*

Distance: *Bicycling from Gaotian to Ancient Banyan Tree covers about eight km; a trip round Jinbao Village is two km long; the Moon Mountain situated two km away.*

Food: *Although restaurants are within convenient reach, travellers may want to bring along simple food and drinks for a picnic wherever they come across beautiful surroundings.*

We left Yangshuo heading south on the Guangzhou-bound state highway. The traffic was busy with buses and trucks shuttling to and fro and we had to mind our way, even though the road was wide and smooth.

Miss Zhang, who had joined us, is a director with the Guilin Song and Dance Ensemble. An experienced cyclist, she used her bicycle to run errands in the city and went on cycling excursions at weekends.

Along the route we came across an orchard with trees laden with ripe oranges. Their beautiful colour was enough to make our mouths water so we went over and bought a few, so that we could enjoy them during our breaks.

Lunch by Jinbao River.

As we pedalled along, our speed started to diminish. It was not that we were tired, but the beauty of the scenery was simply too good to pass by so quickly. We decided to dismount and travel on foot. An old farmer ploughing in the rain told us that we had entered the territory of

Jin Kelin

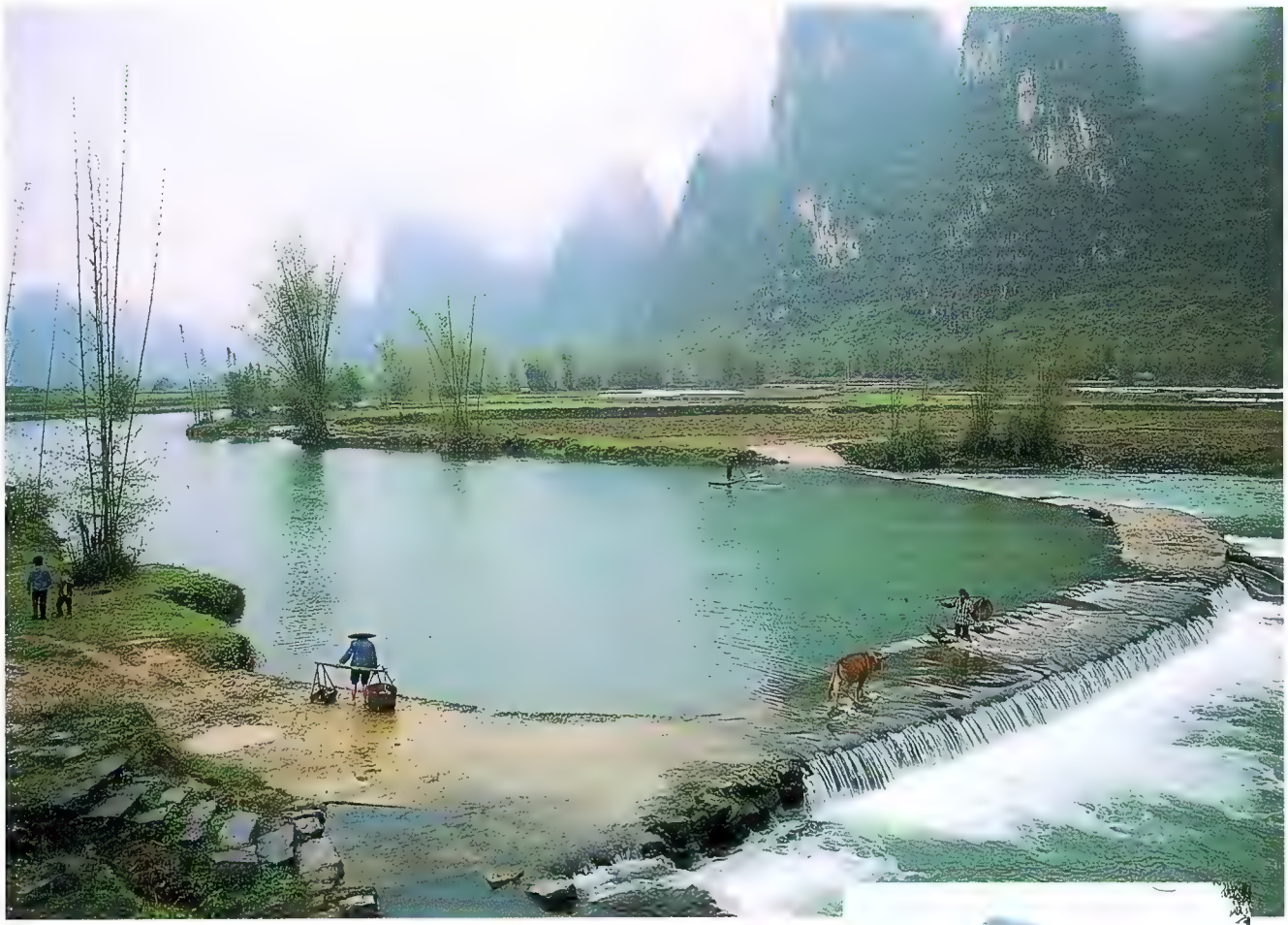
The reflection of the Old Banyan Tree in the river is magnificent.

Gaotian Township. In the distance a milky-white mist hung suspended in mid-air, adding to the elaborate silhouettes of the mountains, an appearance so alluring as to stop the wayfarer in his tracks.

Just like the area of Qifeng, the landscape around Gaotian is another masterpiece of nature, with elegant mountains and sparkling waters mingling with villages and farmers toiling in the fields.

Coasting along a stone bridge, we stopped by an ancient banyan tree where the legendary Third Sister Liu sang songs in antiphonal style with her folk. The tree is huge, with branches stretching out in all directions, with enough foliage to shield an area of nearly half an acre; it would have looked lovelier had it not been for the numerous wooden supports propping up the aged, overgrown boughs. Unfortunately, the section of bridge around the banyan tree was flooded. We had to mount our bicycles and pedal for all our might to cross the river. By the time we reached the other side our shoes and trouser legs were soaked through.

A narrow path conducted us past a number of peaks and an emerald



The scenery in the upper reaches of Jinbao River is stunning.

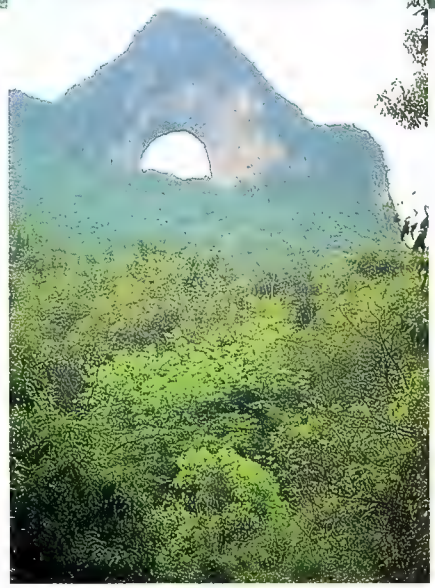
river, winding its way towards Gaotian town. None of us had expected that a visit to the ancient banyan tree could lead us to a place of such breathtaking beauty. Obviously it was uncharted territory, for not a trace of human existence could be found on the rock banks or in the pasture.

Feeling famished, we laid out our oranges, a packet of biscuits and three loafs of bread for a hefty meal. The picnic was made all the more enjoyable as our eyes feasted on the bewitching surroundings.

Revived, we mounted our bicycles once more, and, having ridden through a cluster of houses, were surprised to see the banyan tree again. It appeared that we had made a roundabout tour of the hills.

You can find everything in the Antiques Road in Yangshuo.

Back on the highway we continued our journey south. In 20 minutes we had reached the foot of the Moon Mountain, the centrepiece of a nature park. Jin told us that the view is most appealing at the end of a fine day, with the dark mountain silhouetted against the pale sky, and the round hole in the cliff resembling a full moon. He led us to a certain point on the highway where the view was even more impressive. We dismounted, and were instantly mesmerised, the "full moon" being imbedded in the contours of distant mountains.



The Moon Mountain

While we marvelled at the "moon", our watches told us that it was only two o'clock in the afternoon, it meant we had plenty of time to spare. We stopped at a roadside shop for refreshments before we resumed pedalling at a carefree and relaxed pace down the road to Lipu.

Route Four

Lipu and Fengyu Rock

Base: *Lipu*

Distance: *Moon Mountain to Lipu (28km); Lipu to Fengyuyan (8km). Minibus service available for the 40-kilometre return trip to Yangshuo.*

Food: *There are plenty of restaurants along the way, so there is no need to carry food.*

Degree of Difficulty: *This route is longer than the others, but the going is smoother, due to the good condition of the roads.*

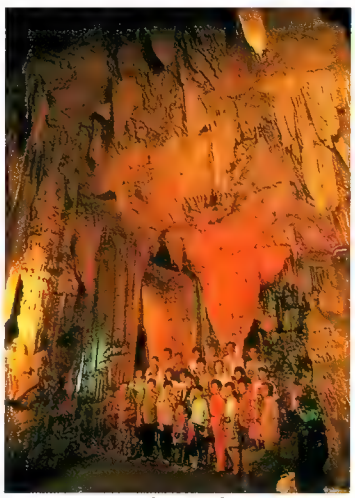
Having wine means "Welcome".

Lipu is situated about 40 kilometres from Yangshuo, but as we had started from the Moon Mountain, the distance was shortened. Nature's charms on this route were no less wonderful than those we had witnessed on the previous route, and we had the feeling that we were travelling within an endless landscape painting. This had such an uplifting effect on us that we became oblivious to the fatigue in our legs. As we admired the scenery, we amused ourselves by sharing anecdotes about local folklore. In no time we were close to the county town.

Once in Lipu, we were invited to join a Hong Kong tourist group on a trip to Fengyuyan. We parked our bicycles at the Lipu Hotel, where we were to stay for the night, and squeezed ourselves onto a coach. In less than 30 minutes the bus had pulled up outside a mountain village. A dozen or so wooden buffalo carts were waiting by the roadside. The visitors cheerfully scrambled on board. The drivers, who were local farmers attired in palm-bark rain capes, cracked their whips, and the buffaloes started to move slowly towards the mountains.

The wooden wheels creaked and the passengers were rocked from side to side as the carts trundled along. One young man jumped up stretching his arms wide and shouted, "What an experience!" The skinny buffalo stopped and turned its head, casting a questioning look at the troublemaker.

The carts stopped next to some farmland. The guide, a young woman, told everyone to disembark and to start digging up some taros and sweet potatoes and to pick fresh kidney beans and melons. The visitors were delighted to learn that dinner would be prepared and served in a nearby Yao-inhabited village. Before long, everyone, bearing the fruit of his or her labour, returned to the carts which then carried us back to the coach.



Visitors admiring the Fengyu cave

Dusk was falling as we rolled into Fengyuyan, a place which we found out had a newly discovered underground limestone cave. We took a cruise along the wide underground river which took us half an hour to reach the other end of the cave.

Now came the climax of our journey on Route Four. A carnival atmosphere prevailed over the Yao-inhabited village in the Fengyuyan scenic zone. As soon as we entered the village gate, a group of young women emerged, who pinched our noses with their fingers and literally "poured" alcohol down our throats. Then we were treated to tea. Among the courses of local delicacies laid on the dinner table we discovered, to our delight, some dishes made from the fresh vegetables we had picked.

After dinner, strapping young men staged a dazzling show of "climbing the mountain of knives" and "plunging down into the sea of fire". By the time some Hong Kong guests were invited to impersonate bridegrooms with their Yao "brides" in a make-believe wedding ceremony, everyone was chasing each other in gay abandon.

Riding in buffalo cart whilst ambling through the forest gives you a sense of romantic feeling.

• Route Five •

Ziyuan, Zijiang River and Longji Mountain

Base: *Ziyuan*

Distance: *Bus to Ziyuan (107 km). The dock for the 22-kilometre cruise along the Zijiang River is situated five kilometres away from town. Bus takes tourists back to town some 50 kilometres away.*

Food: *The restaurant in Langtian Village serves Yao dishes. Tourists can also take their own food onto the boat.*

Degree of Difficulty: *The only trial to overcome is the climb up the Longji Mountain.*

It took us two hours to cover the 100 kilometres back to Lijiang Hotel in Guilin that same night. I went straight to bed, feeling exhausted, and within minutes I was already snoring away.

I awoke the next morning to find the television set still on. I hurried to the lobby just in time to see Jin entering the gate.

The blue waters create a perfect picture.

The destination for this leg of my journey was Ziyuan about 130 kilometres from Guilin. It is impossible to cycle there because of the tough terrain so we caught a Ziyuan-bound minibus and began our journey north. Soon the vehicle left Guilin, drove past Lingchuan and Xing'an, climbed over the Pengcheng Ridge to enter Ziyuan County. On this side of the mountains the karst landmass gave way to a terrain studded with rotund mountains in every size, shape and form.

The county's chief tourism administrator dispatched Manager Su of the local travel service to accompany us on our cruise along the Zijiang River. When asked if we could travel alongside the river by bicycle, Su chortled, saying that we might have been able to ride our bicycles on the way down there, but it could take more than a day to return along the mountain road.

Together with a busload of new arrivals we boarded a huge wooden boat, escorted by a rubber dinghy with eight young men and women passengers wearing orange life jackets.

The river, hemmed in by lush green mountains, passed by unhurriedly as our boat gently plied the waves. At the Fengfan (Wind Blown Sail) Rock the boat dropped anchor to allow the passengers to climb up the mountain road for another look at this colossal rock in the shape of a full sail.

The Yao girls greet Manager Su by throwing him into the air.

The waters of Zijiang River looked cleaner than the Lijiang River, with both banks gleaming with refreshing pine trees and bamboo bushes, so far free from any human damage. Azaleas were in full bloom, adding a touch of liveliness to the otherwise tranquil scenery.

Having gone ashore at noontime at Langtian Village, we were mobbed by young Yao people in a cacophony of gongs, drums and *suona*. The merry-making escalated steadily, until a group of young Yao women took Manager Su captive, daubed his face with rouge and, holding him by his limbs, repeatedly tossed him into the air.

We had lunch in a bamboo dwelling before returning to our boat where our cruise took us to the Tianmen (Heavenly Gate) Mountain which soared to 300 metres and squeezed the Zijiang River into a narrow strip.

On the Dragon Spine, the fog hides everything.

At Shenxian (Celestial Beings') Village, we climbed ashore and filed past what is known as Yixiantian (One Strip of the Sky) and headed all the way along the Longji (Dragon Spine) Mountain. The weather, however, did not cooperate. A thick blanket of fog descended to obscure the mountain's graceful form.

It began raining hard. We had no alternative but to climb back down the mountain and return to the dock where our bus was waiting to begin the 50-kilometre journey back to town along a zigzagging mountain road.

Travelling Tips

GUILIN

The landscape of Guilin, Guangxi, has been eulogised in literary works, paintings and inscriptions for hundreds of years. For many Western visitors Guilin epitomises the landscape of China. It is endowed with green peaks, limpid rivers and mysterious caves filled with statuesque stalactites and stalagmites. For this reason Guilin remains a leading tourist attraction to visitors from every corner of the world.

Jin Kelin

The landscape of Guilin viewed from Fubo Mountain

Major Sights

Diecai (Manifold-Coloured) Mountain Towering over the Lijiang River to the east, the mountain is composed of four peaks named Yuyue, Siwang, Mingyue and Xianhe respectively. The 223-metre-high Mingyue Peak is the tallest in the city proper.

Fupo Mountain is famed for its razor-sharp cliff face rising vertically over the Lijiang River. Sights here include the Linjiang (Riverside) Pavilion, the Huanzhu (Pearl Returning) Cave and the Shujian (Sword-Testing) Rock.

Elephant Trunk Hill So named because it resembles a gigantic elephant drinking water from the river. It is regarded as the emblem of Guilin.

Ludi (Reed-Flute) Cave Situated in Guangming Hill five kilometres northwest of Guilin, the cave is strewn with stalactites, stalagmites, stone curtains, etc., and should not be missed.

Seven-Star Cave The Seven-Star Cave has been a tourist attraction for a thousand years renowned for its wealth of mind boggling rock forms.

Lijiang River "While the river floats like a blue belt, the mountains are evocative of emerald hairpins." The beauty of the Lijiang River is aptly captured by an ancient poet within these two lines. The 88-kilometre stretch of river from Guilin to Yangshuo showcases statuesque peaks and limpid waters in colour tones which change with the seasons.

Transportation All major scenic spots can be reached by public bus, but bicycles are the best way to get around.

Chan Yat Nin

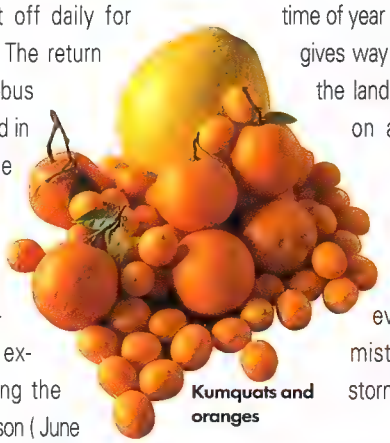
A corner of a night market in Guilin

A popular tourist trip is a boat ride along the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. Tickets cost approximately 250 yuan and can be purchased from the hotels or street ticket booths. Scheduled mini-buses set off daily for Zhujiang Dock. The return trip is by mini-bus which is included in the price of the ticket.

Lodging Many hotels are open to overseas visitors. With the exception of during the peak tourist season (June – August) many hotels offer a discount, so much so that a standard room in a three-star hotel costs slightly over 300 yuan a night.

Food Guilin is known for its rice noodles, dog meat and Chinese sauerkraut. A bowl of rice noodles costs about two yuan. For three yuan you might like to try the region's famous rice noodles flavoured with horse meat at the Youyixuan Restaurant, located at 16 Jiefang Street West.

Shopping Popular buys are fermented beancurd, thick chilli sauce and Sanhua wine. Other local produce include kiwi fruit, Shatian kumquats, oranges, stalactite and talcum sculptures.



Kumquats and oranges

Climate The average annual temperature in Guilin is 19℃, with plenty of rainfall in spring and summer and less precipitation in autumn and winter (frost and snow rarely occur). During the time of year when spring gives way to summer, the landscape takes on an ethereal look with peaks shrouded in cloud, everchanging mists and rain storms.

YANGSHUO

Yangshuo is a tiny county town set amidst limestone pinnacles, just 80 km south of Guilin. Both towns are famed for their gorgeous peaks and elegant waters but Yangshuo is certainly less busy and offers a rare opportunity to explore the small villages in the enchanting countryside.

Routes for Cyclists:

Many Western visitors love to take off along the tracks to discover the idyllic scenery of Yangshuo by bicycle.

The northern route conducts to the towns of Fuli and Xingping and the Huatong Hill in the lower reaches of the Lijiang River. One option is to take the boat from Yangshuo Dock and sail up the Lijiang River to Xingping, then cycle down the highway south to Fuli to see the town's ancient landmarks or to buy calligraphic works and paintings, and then cycle back to Yangshuo along the highway. Another option is to take a cruise on the river all the way to the Shutong Hill scenic zone; once at Fuli Town, it is possible to ride down the highway to Xingping Town and then sail back to Yangshuo along the Lijiang River.

The southern route, which begins from the county seat, covers the ancient banyan tree, the Moon Hill and the Gaotian scenic zone. The enchanting rural scenery of Gaotian Township is worth avisit.

Peng Zhenge

Tailian Hotel

Conveniently there are plenty of roadside restaurants and eateries.

Lodging Yangshuo County operates a variety of guesthouses, ranging from four star hotels to convenient inns. A standard room, with toilet, in an average hotel is 60 yuan. Rooms in an ordinary inn cost only 30 yuan per night.

Food There are all sorts of restaurants and roadside eateries in Yangshuo. Local specialities include dumplings stuffed with minced orange peel and meat, and carp braised in beer. Carp cooked this way, plus a buffet hot pot, costs no more than 60 yuan at a road side eatery.

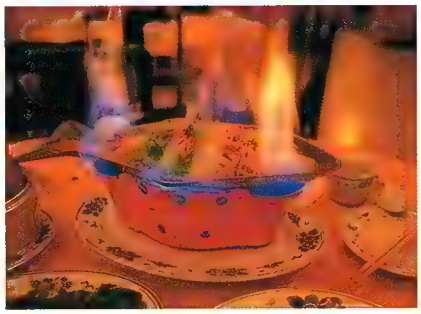
Shopping Yangshuo county abounds with Shatian kumquats and oranges, known for their golden colour, thin peel, and sweetness. Baisha Town, on the way back to Guilin, is a good place to buy them.

LIPU

A newly opened tourist zone, Lipu County is known principally for its Fengyuyan Cave, reputedly the largest limestone cave in China. Tourists are also attracted here for its folklore shows in mountainous villages inhabited by the ethnic Yao people. A ride on a buffalo-drawn carriage around the idyllic rural setting is another unique experience.

Lipu County owes much of its reputation to the taro which, during the Qing Dynasty, were shipped to Beijing as a tribute to the emperor, and commoners rarely had a chance to taste this delicious food. Lipu Taro braised with pork has long been a local delicacy along with cakes fashioned out of Lipu taro.

Lipu is situated about 40 kilometres from Yangshuo, and the landscape along the way is enchanting enough to merit a bicycle ride. Visitors may wish to cycle from Yangshuo to Lipu and then return by bus.



A Guilin speciality, sour vegetable with fish

ZIYUAN COUNTY

Ziyuan is another newly opened tourist zone where the major attraction is an overnight tour along the Zijiang River. Other attractions include Bajiao Village, the Danxia landform and the waterfall group at Baoding.

Every day buses travel the 107 kilometres between Guilin and Ziyuan. Tourists are accommodated at Ziyuan Hotel, Dynasty Hotel, the Post and Telecommunications Mansion, where standard rooms cost 300 yuan per night.

Local produce includes fern, kiwi fruit, brown mushroom and bamboo shoots. The refreshments prepared in the ethnic way of the Miao and Yao minorities at the Ziyuan Hotel are worth a taste.

Where to Rent Your Bicycle

Bicycles can be rented in Guilin across street from either the Lijiang Hotel or Grand Guilin Hotel for six to ten yuan per day. Four-speed mountain bikes are also available from various hotels and guesthouses in Yangshuo for six yuan per day. A 200-yuan deposit is required in Guilin and 500 yuan in Yangshuo.

With regard to traffic laws, all vehicles, including bicycles, should proceed along the right-hand side on the road. During traffic jams, it is advisable to dismount and keep you and your bicycle away from the traffic.

While Travelling:

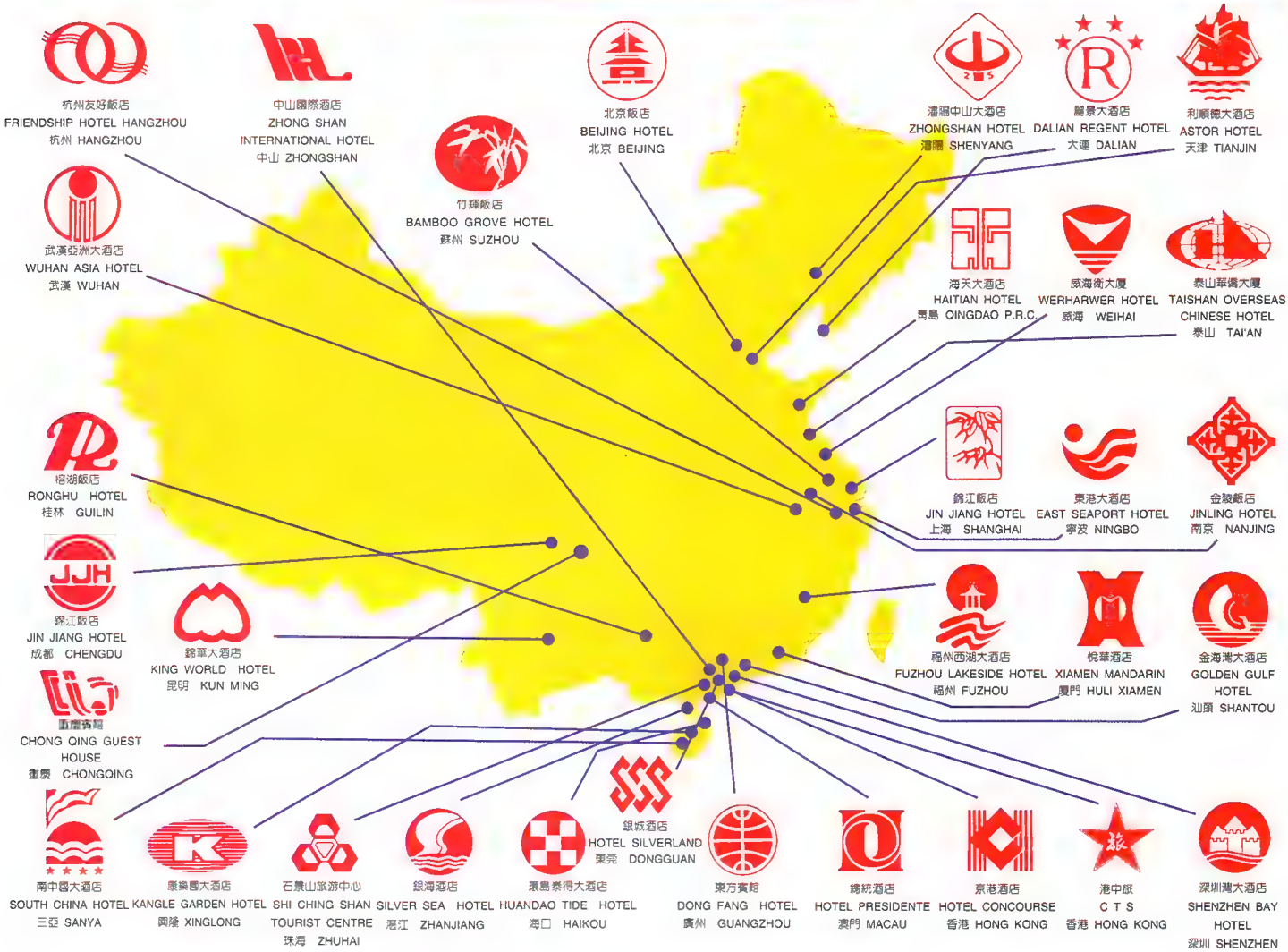
- Take only light-weight gear and provisions as the routes can be long and physically demanding, particularly along mountain tracks. A person of average physical strength should be able to cycle 50 kilometres per day.
- When renting bicycles, check them over thoroughly before leaving the shop. In particular, make sure its gears and brakes work properly. This is important for emergency stops along the mountain routes.
- If the bicycle breaks down, or you get a flat tyre, hitch a ride to the nearest village and seek out the local repair man.
- In case of injury, go to a nearby village to seek treatment at the clinic.
- It is advisable to travel with companions so that in emergencies you can take care of each other.

Many "Bike-for-Rent" stalls have been set up along the tourist routes.

One of Guilin's most famous products, fermented bean curd

一卡走遍 華夏大地

WITH SUCH A CARD AS YOU TRAVEL IN CHINA



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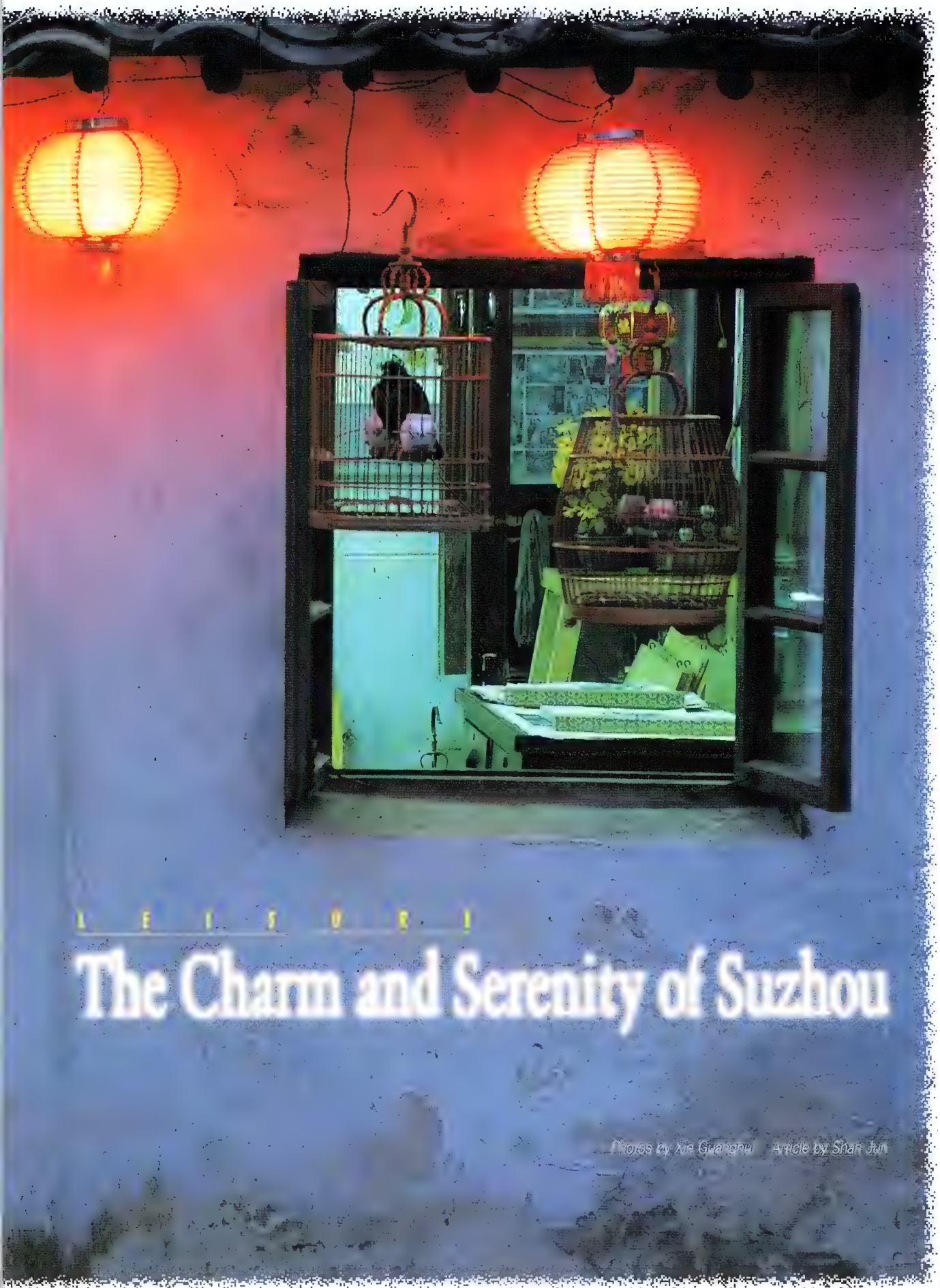
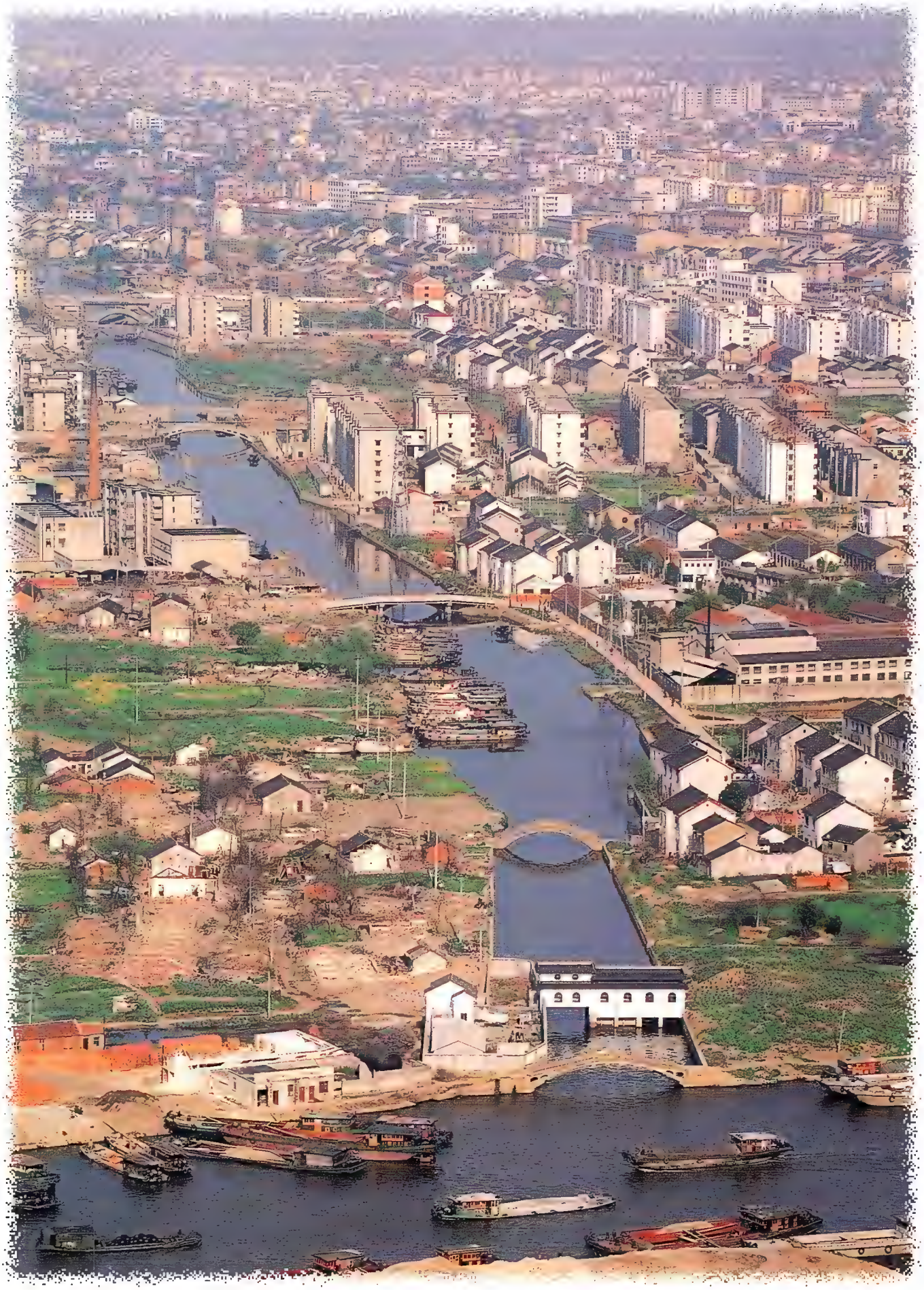


L E I S U R E

The Charm and Serenity of Suzhou

Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Shan Jun



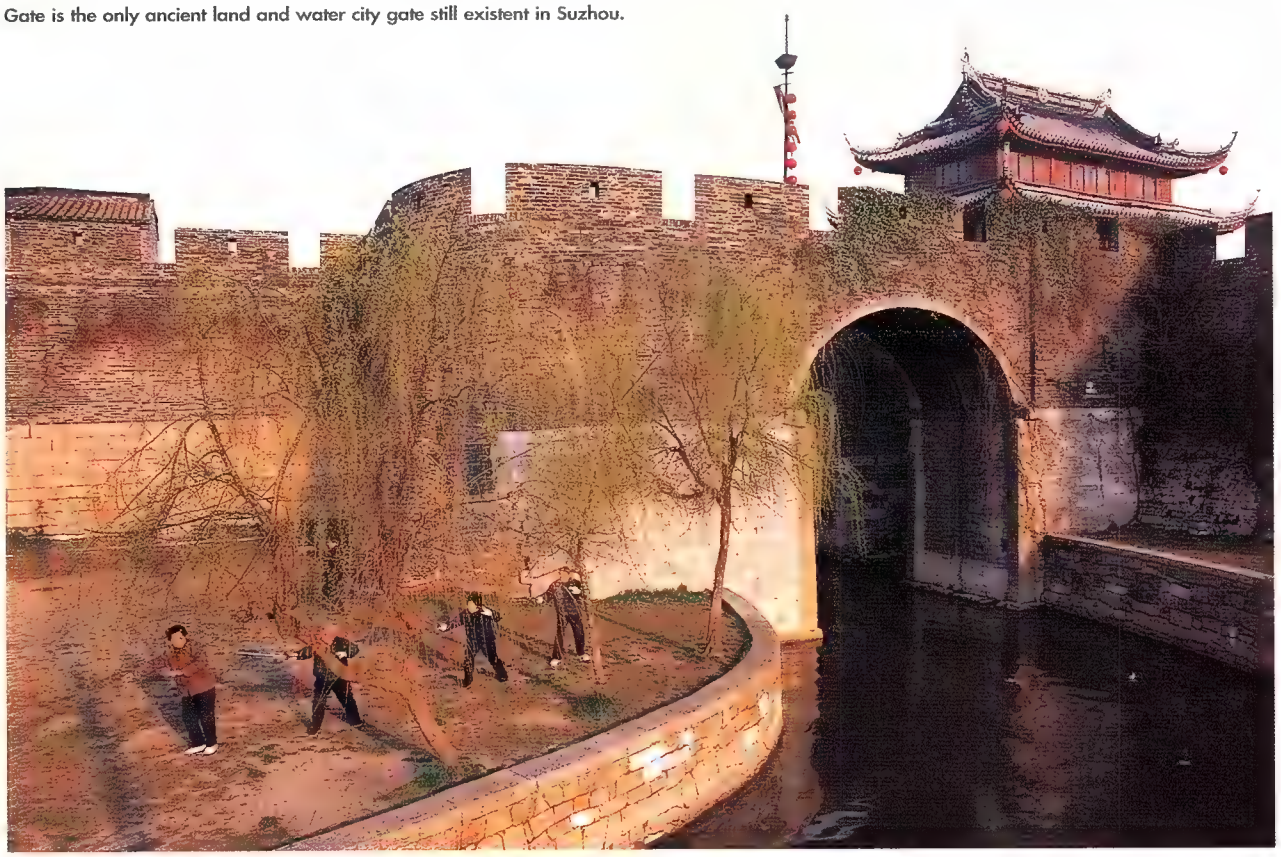
I boarded a boat and embarked on yet another night journey to Suzhou.

In ancient times a boat trip between Suzhou and Hangzhou, reputedly the two earthly "paradises", was a cherished pastime for the intelligentsia. But in those days the boat was smaller, and the water more limpid and sparkling, so that by the time the passenger reached his destination, the poet within him was already bursting with inspiration. The results were a wealth of poems and essays which have become part of Suzhou's classic heritage.

But a member of the intelligentsia I am not. To all intents and purposes I am a bread-winner whose only virtue is a comparatively rich set of travel experiences gained through visiting places of fabled and poetical association. It is an experience whereby I have left my footprints in such ancient cities as Venice, Florence and Prague. Scenes of natural beauty and serenity never fail to enthral me, but none have left me with such wistful memories as Suzhou. The gentle mannerism of the local people and the congenial habits of their life, have had such a salutary effect upon the beautiful water-bound landscape of the city. By comparison, no matter how charming European art and culture are, they are merely transient scenes in my life, and seldom do they arouse a sustainable echo in my heart.

For an entire night I rode on the gentle waves of the Grand Canal. The boat's engine hummed softly. Occasionally a boat or two brushed past in the twilight. I learnt from a veteran passenger that, in the olden days when motorboats were still a rarity, the canal was studded with tiny boats. Nimble boatman sitting on the stern, pedalling the oars with his feet, rudder in hand, while his wife was busy preparing the meal. This reminded me of the gondolas plying the waters of Venice. The difference here is that the rural scene of Suzhou evinces an air of classic sanctity and was thus more touching in an intense way. It's as in the case where the wine never gets drunk, only the drinker!

Previous page: Households in the river city, Suzhou Left page: The Beijing-Hangzhou Canal which runs through Suzhou Below: Panmen Gate is the only ancient land and water city gate still existent in Suzhou.



Life, the Suzhou Way

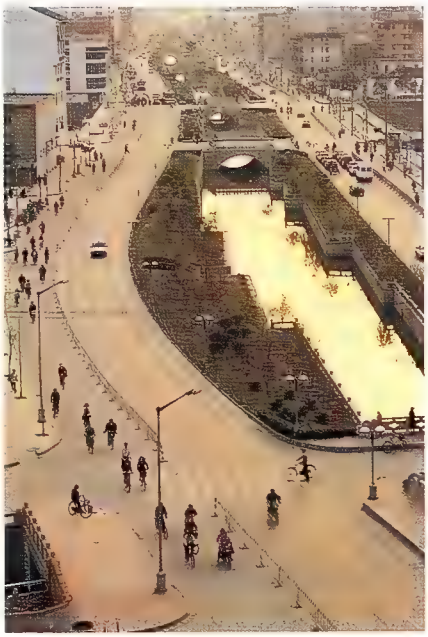
Dawn broke with the sun showering its rays on the water's surface. Suzhou was enshrouded in an ethereal veil of morning mist, mingling with smoke rising from kitchen chimneys. Soon the boat slid into the city and pulled in at the Southern Gate Dock. As I disembarked, I had the feeling that nature had shown favour to the residents of Suzhou by endowing them with a picturesque land, where weeping willows swayed gently by the shores of waterways which criss-crossed the entire city. Skyscrapers cocooned in formidable glass walls are alien to this garden-like city, whose numerous age-old pavilions and pagodas are the envy of those who see nothing but neon lights from their windows. The pace of life in Suzhou is unhurried, and free from the nagging noise of automobiles. The folks are mild-mannered and gently spoken. Despite the glitter of the outside world, they are content with their own congenial lifestyle. They relish comfortable houses – most are built by a river, their doors opening onto a cosy garden-like courtyard. The sight of these houses makes me itch to buy one so that I can have a restful life when I become old enough to retire.

Eating is even more of an art for the locals. Vegetables are only eaten in season, and fish has to be alive and kicking. Whether it is braised, fried, grilled or steamed, mild and light are the common characteristics when it comes to food in Suzhou. Yet through the mildness and lightness, they enjoy the rich flavour of Suzhou cuisine.

I take a particular fancy to the way the Suzhou people drink tea, they nurse a cup of tea merely for the enjoyment of the tea itself. Suzhou's favourite tea is biluochun, its leaves picked from tea trees grown among loquat, orange, plum and other fruit trees giving it a heady floral fragrance. I make a point of visiting Suzhou around Qingming Festival, falling in early April, simply to sip the year's first brew – for me it beats any of the vintage wines in both aroma and taste.

The correct environment is vital to tea drinking. Places of peace and tranquillity are a dime a dozen in Suzhou, whose landscape is clustered with well-kept ancient gardens. My favourite teahouse is at Ouyuan (Lotus-Roots) Garden situated at Xinqiao Lane, where comfort and leisure are guaranteed. Leisure is perhaps what life is all about.

Left page: Shamaoting is one of the oldest story-telling theatres in Suzhou. Above: *Playing flute on Songxi River*



The garden-like Ganjiang Road

People like to do their morning exercises at Beisita.

Shiquan Street retains its elegant style.

A Pool of Talents

A 40-storey building in Shishan Road marks the boundary between Suzhou's old city and its new Technological Development Zone, whose skyline is made magnificent by a group of tall buildings along a thoroughfare. Looking down at the old city from the top of the building, I saw the Grand Canal cross with the Xujiang River, empty itself into the moat and branch out into a maze of waterways. Tucked away among the refreshing verdure are ancient-looking gardens and houses. This glaring contrast between today and yesterday comes as an unusual feast to the eye.

As early as 2,500 years ago the waterside city had already taken shape, thanks to the efforts of the monarchs and officials of the State of Wu. With the passage of time, Suzhou gradually matured into a lyrical haven and a place of cultural elegance. Men of letters arrived in droves; struck by the exotic scenes which greeted them, they penned poem after poem. As word of its charm spread, more arrived.

Like Florence, Italy during the Renaissance, Suzhou is a city deeply rooted in cultural heritage, and is home to numerous talented writers and artists. During the Tang-Qing period alone the city produced 1,200 famous painters. The most notable were Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin and Qiu Ying, known as the Group of Four of the Ming Dynasty. Unfortunately, few of these masters' works are extant today.

Gardens, a Hallmark of Suzhou

Suzhou used to be a place of exile for government officials who had fallen into disfavour. Having been dismissed from their posts for one reason or another, they arrived in Suzhou feeling disgruntled only to become impressed by the charm of the environment. They began to lavish their money and energy on the construction of houses and gardens which would bring the scenes of nature right into their backyards.

But that does not mean all Suzhou gardens belonged to disgraced officials. There was no lack of rich merchants, moneyed gentry and men of letters who rose from-rags-to-riches, all searching for a place to spend their twilight years, or a place where they could live like a hermit.

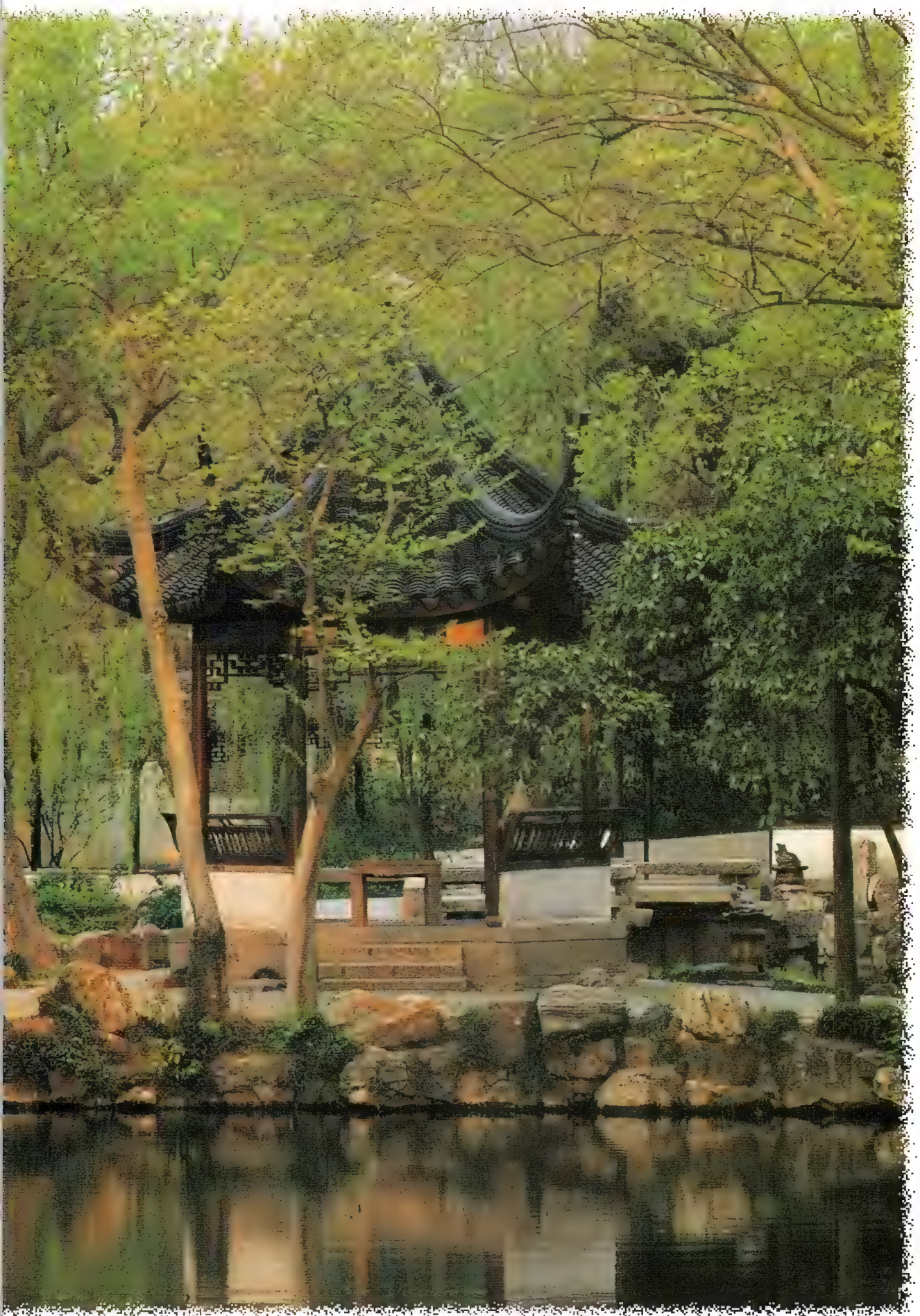
Translated by Ling Yuan

Left Upper: It is a real pleasure to sip tea in a garden. Left Lower: The atmosphere created by the flute playing is so enchanting that visitors are reluctant to leave. Above: *Crossing the Snow-Covered Bridge Riding a Horse*

Dancing in a park

A corridor in Zhuozheng Garden

Embroidering a landscape on silk



Although the Suzhou dialect Suzhou is Greek to many outsiders, the lilting tones of the Suzhou voice is rather pleasing to the ear, especially when sung. Herein lies the beauty of the Suzhou school of story-telling and ballad singing.

It first originated in the days when Buddhist stories were told during the Tang Dynasty, but came into vogue south of the Yangtse River at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, made popular by Emperor Qianlong. As the story goes, whilst on an inspection tour of southern China, the emperor stopped over at the Surging Waves Pavilion where he summoned a silver-tongued ballad singer, called Wang Zhoushi, to sing for him. Then, pleased by the singing, the emperor awarded Wang an official rank and took him back to the imperial palace. Shortly afterwards, Wang returned to Suzhou for reasons of poor health, opened his own ballad singing studio and graced its gate with a sign declaring himself "Imperial Mandated Ballad Singer".

From that point onward the art of Suzhou story-telling and ballad singing gained wide repute. After Wang's demise, famous ballad-singers came to the fore one after the other, each bringing a distinctive style to the stage.

Suzhou story-telling and ballad singing takes three forms: they are performed solo, in duo or in trio. The most popular is duo singing, the man dressed in a grey gown playing the sanxian (a three-stringed instrument) and a woman in a close-fitting mandarin own playing the pipa (a string instrument with a fretted fingerboard), sitting at either end of a small tea table.

A teahouse is the most appropriate venue for listening to the Suzhou-style of story-telling and ballad singing. Here, the singers need not dress formally, and stage props are dispensed with. Members of the audience leisurely sip tea while listening to the performance.

Shamaoting Hall, situated in a tiny lane close by Guanqian Street, is a typical venue. One enters by an inconspicuous front gate similar to that of an ordinary courtyard, behind it is a narrow corridor leading to an old-style garden. Admission is free, and the tea is a reasonable 1.5 yuan. Another theatre is in Wangshi Garden (see picture above).

Listeners very easily become "addicted" to Suzhou story-telling and ballad singing. The stories having been adopted, in the main, from classical Chinese novels such as Outlaws of the Marsh and Romance of Three Kingdoms. At each session the story-teller would hold his audience spellbound, only to bring the episode to an abrupt close by saying, "To know what happened next, please come here tomorrow". In the days when TV was not part of daily life and movies were a luxury, story-telling and ballad singing was one of the few forms of entertainment available in and around Suzhou. Even today, with other forms of entertainment competing for audiences, the people of Suzhou have retained their habitual love of story-telling and ballad-singing.

Smaller Gardens: More Peaceful

Suzhou is a city famed for its gardens, so much so that it is known as "The City of Gardens". Although there are more than 100 gardens spread around the city, four of them have become the most famous, Canglangting (Surging Water) Pavilion, Shizilin (Lion Grove), Zhuzhengyuan and Liuyuan (Lingering) Garden, built respectively in the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. These four gardens are so famous that they are usually so crowded and noisy that it is difficult to enjoy the atmosphere and scenery in the manner in which the ancient-style gardens were designed. So our advice is to visit some of the other lesser known gardens which are perhaps more peaceful.

Ouyuan (Lotus) Garden is located deep in the eastern part of Suzhou in a quiet lane backed by the old city wall and surrounded by canals on all three sides. Sinceno traffic passes by, the garden retains its past air of tranquillity. Many film and TV producers use this garden as an idyllic scene for an outdoor shoot.

Entering the garden and walking towards the east, one passes through a round gate and then along a zigzagging corridor to the right, a beautiful scene waiting to greet you is often described in Chinese literature as "gardens are dotted with halls, and halls are enveloped by gardens". The main building in the garden is the tastefully furnished Chengqu Caotang (Thatched Hall of City River) where the owner, Shen Bingcheng, and his wife entertained their friends. Surrounded by trees, its back door opens onto a small stone path leading to the river. It was said that the Shens often accompanied their departing friends to the riverside to see them off.

In Shangshu Lane of Hulong Street, there is a garden called Yiyuan (Joy) Garden. Although not large, the garden has many halls, pavilions, towers, caves and other interesting places. A double corridor connects the Pray Stone Pavilion and Pine Tower, dividing the garden into two courtyards. At eye level there are glassless windows in the corridor wall through which the onlooker can see different views of artificial hills and ponds, which unfold themselves one by one as in a Chinese landscape painting. Joy Garden was built by a famous calligrapher Gu Jiubin during the reign of Emperor Daoguang of the Qing Dynasty.

Quyuan (Winding) Garden is located at the narrow Mayike Lane. A horizontal sign with Li Hongzhang's inscription, "Writing Hall of Imperial Secretary Yu of Deqing" hangs over a small entrance. A long corridor leads to the Winding Pavilion, which faces water on three sides. Around the bend of an artificial hill a beautiful scene is created by a "Winding Peak Tower" and a "Peony Terrace". This represents the study-style architecture of late-Qing gardens.

Translated by M.Q.

Tips for Touring Suzhou

Suzhou girls.

Transportation:

Air: Shuofang Airport in Suzhou only operates four domestic routes. Most tourists travel into or out of Suzhou by transiting from Hongqiao Airport in Shanghai. A 82 kilometre convenient highway connects the two places and Every morning two regular airport buses leave from the CAAC ticket office at Beisita Pagoda for Hongqiao.

Train: Most north-bound passenger trains from Shanghai stop at Suzhou Railway Station.

Boat: At the ferry of the South Gate daily passenger boats leave for Hangzhou, Wuxi, Xiashi of Zhejiang (watching sea tide at Haining) and Zhangjiagang. Sleeping berth tickets cost between 20-30 yuan each.

Getting Around: Suzhou is not a big city and all the places of interests are quite concentrated in one area. You may hire a taxi, but buses are also convenient. Bus No.1 from the railway station, runs past Beisita Pagoda, Xuanmiaoguan Temple, Winding Garden, Garden of Joy, Surging Water Pavilion and Confucius Temple. If you alight at Surging Water Pavilion, you may take a walk along a small lane to Wangshiyuan Garden, then walk along Shiquan River, Shengjiadai River, Pingjiang River and enjoy the riverside scenery with residential houses and small bridges. On you way to these places, you can also visit the Twin Pagodas, Opera Museum, Winding Garden and Administrator's Garden. It would be an interesting experience to board a rowing boat through the city's inner canals, if you are lucky to see one. Bus No. 5 travels passes Tiger Hill, West Garden, Lingering Garden, Lion Grove and the Folk Museum. Another place worth visiting is the Art Garden of the Ming Dynasty, which lies hidden in a small, zigzagged lane near Jinmen Gate.

Accommodation: Suzhou's tourist industry is quite well developed and has more than 20 hotels, most of which are located around the area of Shiquan Street. The high-class hotels include Nanyuan Hotel, Suzhou Hotel, Zhuhui Hotel and Nanlin Hotel, which are grouped at the quiet south-east end of town. They are further out but are more spacious, have more amenities and are built in unique architectural styles. The standard room rate is 600-800 yuan per day. Medium-class hotels like Gusu Hotel and Suyuan Hotel cost 300-400 yuan per day, while some hostels and inns cost about 100-150 yuan.

Food: Food in Suzhou is dependent on seasons and selected ingredients of fish and aquatic products. Suzhou cuisine is very particular about the original colour, original flavour, lightness of the food. The Pine and Crane (Songhelou) Restaurant at the centre of Guanqian Street is an old restaurant with a history of 250 years best-known for its dishes of Mixed Vegetable Soup, Snowflake Crab Meat, Sweet and Sour Mandarin Fish and others. The Moonshine (Deyuelou) Restaurant at Taijiannong Lane is famous for its, ancient architecture and rich Suzhou flavour. Its best-known dishes are Moonshine Chicken, Thousand-layer Mandarin Fish and Puli Chicken. Prices start from 10 yuan per dish to a few dozen yuan. Loads of vendors provide tasty snacks on the corner of Renmin Road and Guanqian Street at the night food stalls.

Shopping: Among numerous traditional art crafts the most famous is Suzhou embroidery famous for its fine, elegant needlework. Embroidery articles can be found in most souvenir shops, but the best place is the Suzhou Embroidery Research Institute located on Jingde Road. The price per piece is well above 1,000 yuan.

Climate: Its climate is mild with an annual average temperature of 15℃. Spring is the best time for a visit when the gardens are full of vitality.

Hanshan Temple has been a place of worship for hundreds of years.

This sandalwood fan is two metres wide.

DALIAN
GATEWAY TO NORTHEAST CHINA

Situated at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsular, Dalian is a scenic city which faces the Yellow Sea to the east and the Bohai Sea to the west. To the south across the sea, it sits opposite the Shandong Peninsular and its hinterland to the north links to Northeast China. The ice-free Dalian Harbour, one of China's five major harbours, acts as a maritime gateway for the three northeast Chinese provinces and Inner Mongolia. With a population of more than five million people, the city covers a total territory of 12,500 square kilometres and boasts a coastline extending 890 kilometres.

It abounds in tourist resources, its 30-kilometre-long sea coast being strewn with scenic spots such as the Bangchui Isle and Tiger Beach. The Jinshitan National Tourist Zone is equipped with a world-class golf course

European-style buildings in Dalian (by Shi Baoxiu)

1

2

and marina. The Daheishan Mountain and the Bingyu Gully are famed for their natural beauty. Lüshun, which has witnessed the ravages of war, attracts tourists with its collection of historical artefacts. The Bihai Mountain Resort, China's first tourist attraction operated by farmers, features an aquarium, amusement park, gardens, and a mansion inspired by those in classical Chinese novels.

3

4

A Brief Introduction

Dalian is a city with a short history of less than 100 years. It came into existence in the early Han Dynasty as a tiny fishing village which grew into a city by 1898. During the period from 1840 to 1945, Dalian and its hinterland were repeatedly invaded by Britain, Russia, Japan and other imperial powers.

Dalian of today has become an industrial city with more than two hundred large and medium-sized enterprises, covering machine manufacture, metallurgy, petroleum, electronics and textile industries. The Dalian Shipyard and the Dalian Rolling Stock Factory are among China's core state enterprises.

Dalian was the fifth port after Shenzhen, Shatoujiao, Shanghai and Tianjin to be granted permission to establish a bonded trade zone. Situated in the Dalian Economic and Technological Development Zone, the bonded zone is able to capitalise on the advantages that Dalian has as a deep-water harbour for the development of trade, and helping to expand the country's exports, transit trade and processing industries.

With an extensive transport network, Dalian operates nine ferry lines to Guangdong and Shanghai and five local lines. The railway station operates over 20 passenger trains to such places as Beijing and Harbin. The local airport provides flights to Hong Kong, Tokyo, Osaka and Seoul and 31 major cities in China. Dalian Harbour contains 58 berths with modern facilities and maintains trade relations with more than 140 countries and regions around the world. Convenient transportation facilities have turned Dalian into the leading maritime centre in northeast China.

Dalian is also a major fishing area in north China. The surrounding coastal waters contain nearly 100 species of fish.

Every year Dalian is the venue for four major international events which integrate tourism, culture, sports and business. There is the Scholar Tree Watching Festival in May, the Trade Fair in July, the Fashion and Art Festival in August, and in October the International Marathon and Ice Lantern Festival. The week-long International Fashion Festival, a world-renowned event which attracts thousands of foreigners, features an exhibition containing world-famous designer labels, and stages fashion shows with both Chinese and foreign models. The entire city comes alive on the first day of the festival, with a fashion parade in the street preceding the opening ceremony, which is held in the People's Stadium at night.

Tourist Spots

Binhai Road Scenic Zone This is the most distinctive tourist zone in Dalian. A seaboard highway, which extends for more than 30 kilometres, threads through beaches, mountains and scenic areas. Tiger Beach, with a mountain behind it in the shape of a tiger, has crashing waves whose sound resembles a tiger's roar. A cruise from Guozhan Bridge takes tourists across the water to such attractions as Nantian (South Heavenly) Gate, Xiangbi (Elephant Trunk) Rock and Xiezi (Crab) Cave. Baisha (White Sand) Beach on Bangchui Island, situated at the southern end of Binghai Road, is known as the best beach in Dalian. The 40-hectare Fujiazhuan to the west of Yanwoling is a natural park which is blends mountains, isles, creeks, forests and water.

Bingyu Gully Situated in Zhuanhe County, it is a typical example of conic karst landform. Over an area of about 40 square kilometres are clustered some 200 scenic spots; there are also ruins of temples built during the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. The mountain tops above Binggu Gully provide excellent vantage points for observing the sunrise over the Yellow Sea. The gully is also covered with acres of natural forest threaded with sparkling rivers and streams.

Liangshui Bay which contains Jinshi (Golden Stone) Beach, is 30 kilometres east of the city of Jinzhou. The beach there extends seven kilometres. On the western edge of the peninsular is a five-kilometre-long string of rocks jutting out of the sea, in a hundred and one exotic forms. Known as a geology museum, the reef belt features a grey stone bridge riddled by the constant pounding of the sea and russet vertical cliffs. To the east rises the Xiangbi (Elephant Trunk) Mountain, so called because of its 20-metre-high natural stone arch in the shape of an elephant trunk. A golf course and a marina have been built in the Liangshui Bay.

Wugu Castle The castle is deep in the mountains in central Jinxin County. Built during the Eastern Han Dynasty, it has a history of 1,900 years. The castle wall, which is nine metres tall in parts and five kilometres long, is fashioned out of large stone slabs. Surrounding a basin-like area, which used to be an army garrison, it was built to defend the Liaodong Peninsular. The Qingquan Monastery inside the castle houses statues of celestial beings, murals and stone slabs inscribed with texts telling the story of this ancient fortification. It is said that during the Ming Dynasty, a nun named Wu repaired and refurbished the temple with money she had raised single-handedly. Since then the place has been renamed Wugu Castle in her memory.

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7

1. Mural which looks like a child's jigsaw puzzle. (by Shi Baoxiu)
2. The fashion festival provides an excellent opportunity to increase sales. (by Chan Yat Nin)
3. A seafood restaurant in the Five-Coloured City in Dalian. (by Shi Baoxiu)
4. A street scene. (by Ma Yuanhao)
5. Models displaying new fashions during the Dalian International Fashion Festival. (by Chan Yat Nin)
6. Prawns are the most famous of Dalian's aquatic produce. (by Chan Yat Nin)
7. Drying out the fishing nets on the beach. (by Zhang Haitao)

Lüshun Fort Situated on the southernmost tip of the Liaodong Peninsular, Lüshun witnessed the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905). The sites marking the invasions have been preserved and put on display for the benefit of visitors. The famous bird island and snake island are just offshore. Lüshun also features a history museum, a navy museum and the Snake Island Museum, the world's second largest showcase of snakes.

Bihai Mountain Resort The Bihai Mountain Resort, the first tourist facility built and run by farmers, is a comprehensive tourist park which covers an area of 150 hectares and is 25 kilometres from Dalian city centre. On its premises are trenches dug during the Russian-Japanese War, Beihai Temple, an aquarium, a theme palace based on the classical novel *Journey to the West*, an amusement park, and the Fairy Garden whose building is inspired by those in classical Chinese novels.

Dragon King's Pond On the way from Dalian to Lüshun, it is popular for its sparkling water and fragrant flowers. On its shore is a garden of Japanese cherry blossom trees. It is said that most of the scenes of flowering cherry blossom appearing in Chinese films were shot in this garden. The garden also has a four-metre-tall magnolia tree transplanted from Japan, which is reputedly the tallest of its kind in China.

Article by Huang Yanhong
Translated by Ling Yuan

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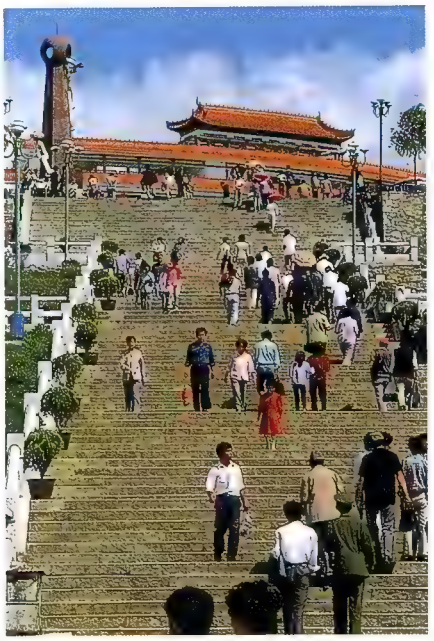

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For Your Reference

Major Travel Services:

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Royal Hotel

143 Zhongshan Road, Dalian, 116011
Tel: (411) 3633111 Fax: (411) 3638211
Located 0.5 km from railway station, 11 km from airport, 2 km from pier, close to the city centre.

Grand Hotel

1 Jiefang Road, Zhongshan District, Dalian, 116001
Tel: (411) 2806161 Fax: (411) 2806969
Located 1.5 km from railway station, 16 km from airport, 2 km from pier, 1.5 km from city centre.

Inn Fine Hotel

Changchun Road, Economic and Technical Development Zone, Dalian, 116600
Tel: (411) 7612888 Fax: (411) 7611322
Located 8 km from railway station, 27 km from airport, 37 km from pier.

Nanshan Hotel

56 Fenglin Street, Zhongshan District, Dalian, 116001
Tel: (411) 2638751 Fax: (411) 2804898
Located 1.5 km from railway station, 13.5 km from airport, close to the pier and the city centre.

Beach Hotel

Xiao Fujiazhuang, Dalian, 116013
Tel: (411) 2672533 Fax: (411) 2681847

Dalian Hotel

4 Zhongshan Square, Zhongshan District, Dalian, 116000
Tel: (411) 233111 Fax: (411) 2634363

Furama Hotel

74 Stalin Road, Dalian, 116001
Tel: (411) 2630888 Fax: (411) 2804455
Located 2 km from railway station, 15 km from airport, close to the pier and the city centre.

Holiday Inn

18 Shengli Square, Zhongshan District, Dalian, 116001
Tel: (411) 2808888 Fax: (411) 2809704
Right in the city centre, close to the railway station, 11 km from airport.

Recommended Travel Routes:

There are five routes which may bring the traveller to all the scenic attractions which are worth a look.

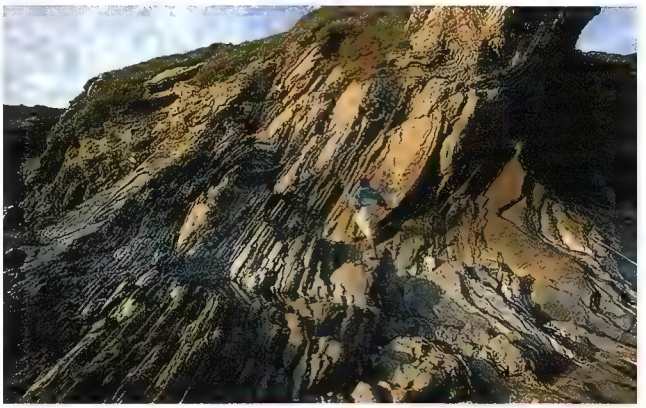
1. The downtown route. This route leads the traveller around the city, bringing him to Binghai Road for a visit to Xinghai Park, Baiyunshan Park, the observation tower, Fujiazhuang, Yanwoling, Beidaqiao, Tiger Beach Park; the zoo and botanical gardens; the Natural History Museum and the harbour.

2. The Lüshun route. This route leads to the ruins of the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-1905 on the northern ramparts of the Jiguan Mountain in east Lüshun, the Erlong Mountain and the Houshi Mountain; the History Museum, the Naval Equipment Museum, the Snake Island museum, and the site of the former Lüshun Prison; the Zoo, the Botanical Garden, and Victory Tower. One-day tour services are available covering this route.

3. The Jinzhou route. This route enables the traveller to have a look at the Ringing Water View at the Dahei Mountain, the Jinshi Beach, the Hall of the Prince of Tang, the Dalian New Harbour, and the Fishing Harbour in Dalian Bay.

4. Development zone and the Bihai Mountain Resort. This route reaches the Dalian Development Zone, the Five-Coloured City, the Art Palace based on the mythological novel *The Making of Gods*, the theme palace based on the classical novel *Journey to the West*, and the aquarium; the Bihai Mountain Resort, the amusement centre, and the mansion built with inspirations from classical Chinese novels. A one-day tour to the development zone and the Bihai Mountain Resort is available.

5. The route to the eastern mountains. This route goes to Wugu City in Xinjin County, the Qingquan Temple, the Bingyu Gully and the Fairy Cave in Zhuanhe County, and the Biliuhe Reservoir. A two-day tour to the Bingyu Gully is available.



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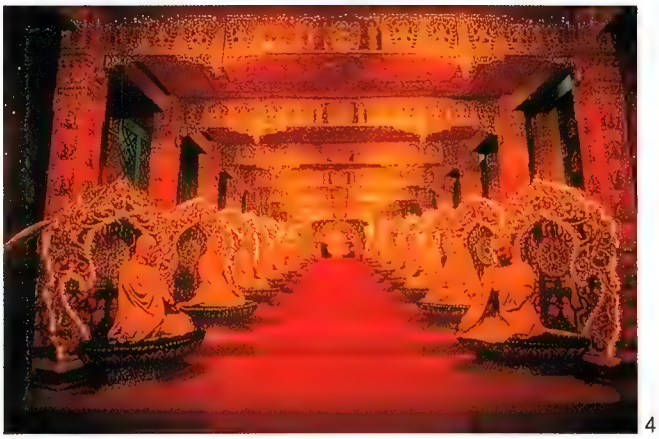

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Shopping:

Dalian is famous for its fish and fruit. Among the most prized of Dalian's aquatic products are prawns, sea cucumbers, dried scallop, conches, crabs and shark's fins. As for fruit, Dalian leads China in the production of apples and has nearly 50 varieties, the Liaonan apple being the most famous. Cherries and peaches are another two major exports from Dalian. The peanuts produced in the vast Liaodong Peninsular are famous for their high quality. Farmers in Dalian began planting peanuts some 70 years ago.

Dalian is also known for its glassware. Crafted with exquisite skill, Dalian's artistic glassware comes in some 3,000 varieties, with motifs figures, animals and flowers.

Shell carving is yet another famous Dalian art which combines elements of traditional Chinese painting with bas-relief carving. Visitors to Dalian are often delighted by these pieces of art fashioned out of tiny shells or stones picked from the bottom of the sea.

Transportation:

Dalian airport operates six flights a week to Hong Kong, and four flights weekly to Tokyo. Daily flights go to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Harbin. The train service is convenient for getting from Dalian to Beijing, Shenyang and other northern Chinese cities, but no express train service is available to cities in South China.

1. A Japanese cherry tree garden (by Xing Yansheng)
2. Bihai Mountain Resort in a Dalian Suburb
3. Rocks on Jinshi Beach (by Chan Yat Nin)
4. A Buddhist theme park (by Shi Baoxiu)
5. Ancient ramparts in Lushun (by Chan Yat Nin)

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BRONZE VESSELS OF THE

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About seven kilometres away from the Famen Monastery on the border between Qishan and Fufeng counties, in the western part of the central Shaanxi plain, lies an area known as the "Zhouyuan Ruins" from where a large number of bronzes of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-770 B.C.) have been unearthed. This place is believed to be the site of the capital city and graveyard of the Western Zhou Dynasty.

Home of Bronzes

Over the past 2,000 years, numerous bronzes have been unearthed from this area, over 1,000 pieces being excavated within the last 100 years. Built by the local people, the Museum of Western Zhou Dynasty Bronzes has a collection of precious cultural relics which rank first in China in terms of their number, variety and complexity of inscriptions. The *Maogong Ding* (cooking vessel), for example, contains an inscription of 497 words, the longest so far found among the Shang and Zhou bronzes. *Li Wang Gui*, a food container cast by King Li in order to offer sacrifices to his ancestors, weighs more than 30 kilograms, the heaviest of its kind unearthed so far.

2

Marks of History

Bronze began to be used as early as the Xia Dynasty (21st-16 century B.C.) and entered a period of great prosperity during the Shang Dynasty (16th -11th century B.C.), being further developed in the Spring & Autumn Period (8th-5th century B.C.) which is called the "Era of Bronze".

During the Western Zhou Dynasty the State established a complete system of etiquette for ceremonies, social classes, etc. It also stipulated clearly the social status of

Western Zhou Dynasty

3

the emperor, princes, dukes, ministers and officials and promulgated their moral norms and cultural needs. Bronze vessels became the ritual articles used to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, to serve food when entertaining guests, as rewards to outstanding officials and to record achievements. They were so precious that their owners wanted to be buried with them, thus becoming burial items.

A Symbol of Power

By the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the *ding* (a three- or four-legged cauldron) had become an important ritual vessel and had lost its practical value as a cooking utensil. It served to symbolise the status and power of the nobility. Common people were not allowed to own pieces of bronze ware, let alone be able to afford it. Bronze was monopolised by the rich and the noble. The higher one's position, the greater power one attained, the more wealth one accumulated, the more bronze ritual vessels one owned.

4

Exquisite Decorations

The craftsmen of these bronze ritual vessels paid much attention and took great care to please the tastes of the ancient ruling classes. Even today, they are highly admired by the masses for their exquisite craftsmanship.

The bronze ritual vessels of the Western Zhou Dynasty were designed with rich and elaborate decoration. For example, the *si gong* (a drinking vessel), shows well the superb founding techniques of the ancient craftsmen as well as their design and engraving skills. In the same

5

1. ***He*** **(by Yang Limin)**
2. ***Gong*** **with sheep design (by Luo Zhongmin)**
3. ***You*** **with loop handle (by Cao Shuguang)**
4. ***Hu*** **(by Yang Limin)**
5. **Four-legged *li* cooking vessel (by Qiu Ziyu)**

1

category are the *zun* (a cup) with various bird and animal designs, and the *you* (a jar) with a loop handle.

Taking a closer look, the patterns can be divided into three different categories: geometric, zoomorphic and human mask. Geometric patterns can be further divided into bow-string patterns using raised cross lines with one or three zigzag lines; nipple pattern with raised nipples forming a line or a square; cloud and thunder pattern using various curving lines; and circling lines in the form of swirling water.

Zoomorphic patterns mainly include designs in the shape of birds, fish, dragons, etc. One pattern called *tao-tie*, a legendary beast, is the most popular. This imaginary beast of ancient China has a head but no body and is always hungry for food, to the point of being greedy. The ancient craftsmen used their creativity to conjure up designs of this imaginary beast in the look of other animals such as ox, sheep, tiger and deer. These designs were cast widely on bronze ritual vessels. Perhaps the reason why they had such popularity among the ancient rulers was because they wanted to use the fierce surrealist image to raise their level of prestige and power, or to frighten their subjects and chase monsters away.

An Introduction to Some of Bronze Ritual Vessels

Archaeologists have devoted years to the study of the bronzes we see in the museum today. Each vessel has a function, a name and a purpose:

Zun is a round vessel with broad mouth and bulging belly used for drinking wine. It was very popular in the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties but became rare in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty.

Some *zun* were decorated with bird and animal designs. It has a strong decorative, and highly artistic value.

You is a round or oval wine container with a big, deep belly, small mouth, cover and swing handle. After each ritual or ceremony, the wine contained within the jar was poured onto the ground as a sacrificial offering to the ghosts and gods.

Gui, a deep circular vessel with a lid, used as a container for grain or cooked food. When inverted

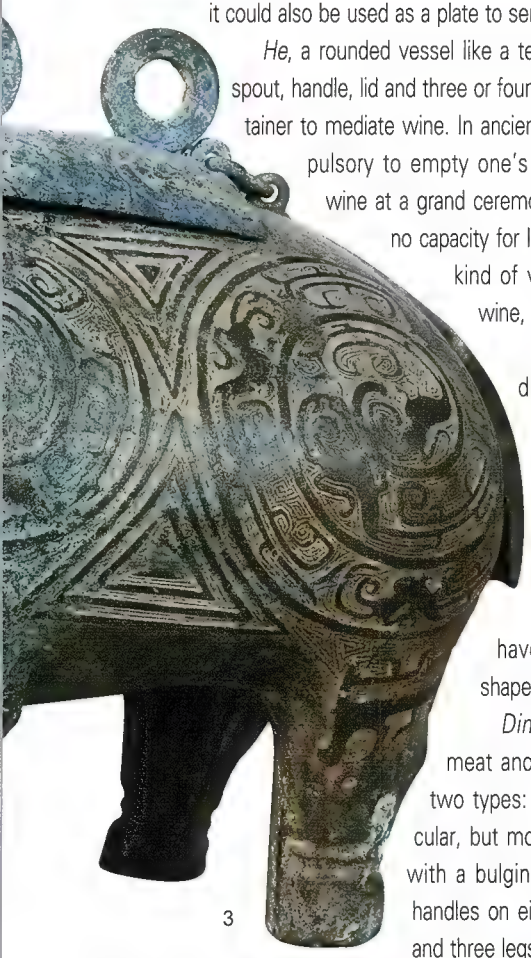
2

it could also be used as a plate to serve food.

He, a rounded vessel like a tea pot with a closed spout, handle, lid and three or four legs, used as a container to mediate wine. In ancient times it was compulsory to empty one's cup while drinking wine at a grand ceremony. Those who had no capacity for liquor would use this kind of vessel to dilute the wine, mixing it with water.

Gong, a lidded drinking vessel with spout, handle and a square stand or four legs. Its lid is usually in the shape of an animal's head. Some have their body in the shape of an ox-horn.

Ding, a cauldron for meat and cereals. There are two types: rectangular and circular, but most *ding* are circular, with a bulging belly, ear-shaped handles on either side of the rim and three legs. Most of the Western Zhou *ding* have a lid.



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Li, a cooking vessel in the shape of a *ding*, with three or four hollow legs.

Dou, a vessel used as a container to hold cereals in earlier times but was later used to keep pickles and meat juices. It looks almost modern.

4

Jia, a round vessel used to heat wine, with three legs, handle and cap but no spout.

Unknown Craftsmen

All the bronze-ware of the Western Zhou are regarded as pieces of ancient art and their creators are viewed upon as truly great masters, but unfortunately none left their mark on the pieces. They are therefore known by the same name "Great Master Anonymous". ◘

Article by Shi Baoxiu
Translated by Xiong Zhenru

5

1. Rectangular *li* cooking vessel (a rectangular chamber inside its bottom held burning charcoal; it resembles a modern hot pot) (by Chapman Lee)
2. *Gui* (by Guo Qun)
3. *Gong* with elephant design (by Yang Limin)
4. *Gong* with mythical animal design (by Yang Limin)
5. Animal mask formed with patterns in the nipple, swirl, and cloud and thunder designs (by Tai Chi Yin)

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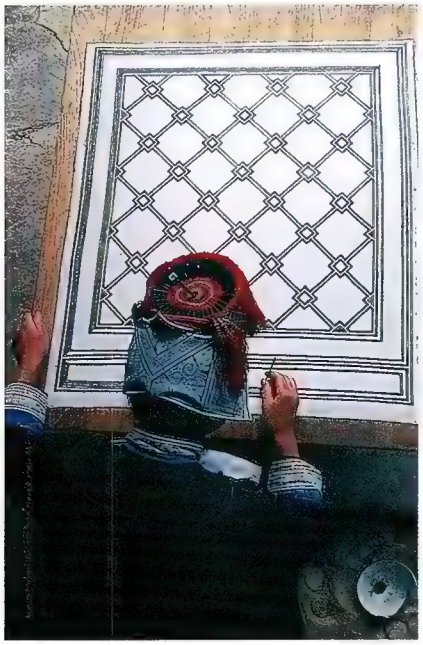
GUIZHOU BATIK

A story exists among the ethnic minorities living in Danzhai County in Guizhou: A long time ago there once lived a clever and beautiful girl, her family was so poor that they could not buy her a brightly coloured skirt traditionally worn during festivals or holidays. So, when other girls put on their beautiful



clothes and went to sing and dance with the young men, she always stayed at home, feeling very lonely and sad. One day a honeycomb fell from the ceiling onto a white cloth she was weaving. Wax spilled out and immediately solidified on the cloth. Thinking nothing of it, she put the cloth into a vat of indigo blue dye. To her surprise, beautiful white patterns stood out dramatically against the blue background where the wax had fallen. She made herself a skirt from the cloth. Now, in her new outfit, she became the centre of attention with all the young men chasing after her.

As far as I have learned, the batik produced in Anshun, Zhenning, Huangping and Danzhai in Guizhou Province have developed a strong local flavour, and these places have become known as "the home of batik", where the people of the Miao, Buyi, Shui, Yao and Gelo minorities all excel in the art.

Shi Baoxu

The great variety of patterns and designs of batik takes its themes from daily life and animal activities. Its patterns include flowers, plants, fish, birds, the sun, the moon, landscapes and geometric figures. Styles of different ethnic groups also differ greatly; some are bold and lively, others beautiful, simple or unadorned. Traditionally, the folk artist creates his or her designs while applying the wax to white cloth, using an instrument made of bamboo or copper. After the wax turns cool, the cloth is dipped in dye. The wax is then removed by placing the cloth in boiling water, and the design which has been protected

Upper: Various pieces of batik on sale
Left: Waxing, one process of batik-making
Lower: Ethnic women washing batik cloth in the river

from the dye is left in white with a coloured background. If two or more colours are used, successive parts of the design are left exposed to the different dyes. After the cloth is washed and dried, a beautiful, colourful piece of batik is created.

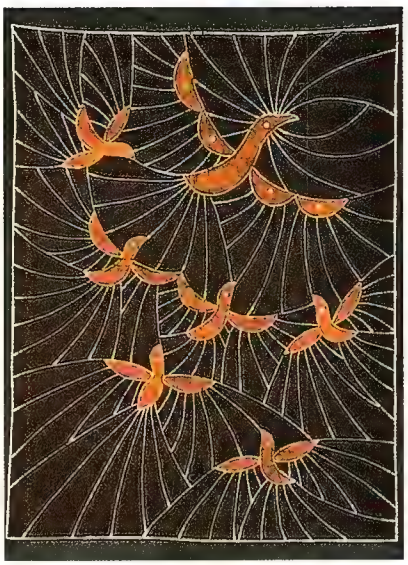
Batik pieces from different ethnic groups have their own unique style. The simplistic batik of the Buyi ethnic group in Zhengning, usually in the tasteful colours of blue, light blue and white, is used to adorn their jacket sleeves, collars and skirts. The batik of the Miao people in Anshun is used for clothes or for decorations on bed sheets and door curtains. With exquisite patterns, the batik is usually in blue and white studded with red and green. The Gelo people in Anshun love to dip the cloth in blue dye many times so as to intensify the colour to let the patterns stand out in striking contrast against the background. Their batik patterns are often used on towels and scarves or decoratively on clothes.

Batik cloth is widely used for scarves, handkerchiefs, hats, aprons, bags, quilt covers, sheets, curtains, tablecloths and some art pieces such as batik landscapes and calligraphic works. Some young men and women even wear jeans with batik designs.

Generally there are no fixed prices for batik pieces, they range from several dollars to several hundred dollars depending on its place of origin and intricacy of design. Very often one needs to bargain, so a cheap buy really depends on how well you can bargain.

Photos by Wang Miao
Article by Mafada
Translated by Xiong Zhenru

Guo Mei



Guo Mei

Right, Upper: Blue, white and red are commonly used colours.
Left, Upper: This pattern of traditional masks of the minority ethnic groups has a colouring unseen in traditional wax printing.
Left, Lower: The range of batik patterns is vast. This particular piece has flying birds patterned with fan-shaped lines.
Right, Lower: A bag made of batik cloth

Daokou Roast Chicken

Daokou Roast Chicken, so called by the locals, is in fact a roast chicken speciality of a shop called Yixing Zhang in Daokou. The history of the chicken goes back more than 300 years, to the Qing Emperor Qianlong. A man called Zhang Bing managed to get hold of a secret recipe from the Qing imperial kitchen. He succeeded in following the roast chicken recipe and was proud of the results. Yixing

The herbs and spices not only give the chicken a delicious flavour but also promote good health.

Zhang roast chicken is so tender that the meat falls away from the bone simply by holding it by one leg and shaking it. The taste is delicious and it can be eaten either hot or cold.

Cooking the chicken is rather complicated requiring many different stages. The first thing is to select the right chicken; it should be a plump hen between six-months to two-years old and weigh between 1-1.25 kg.

Next is the skilful cleaning of the chicken. Place it into hot water between 58-60℃. If the water is too hot, the skin will burn, and if it is not hot enough the skin becomes purple and will not look good.

After cleaning, the chicken is "propped up" to fix its form. To do this, turn the chicken chest up and make a cut between the ribs and the spine. Then use a piece of sorghum stalk to "prop up" the chicken from the inside. Cut a small hole in the lower part of the chicken's abdomen and, crossing the two legs, insert them into the hole. The two wings are also crossed and inserted into the hole at the neck. The chicken, then in the shape of an olive, is hung on a rope to dry.

The chicken is then fried. The whole chicken is coated in honey water and then submerged into boiling oil (150℃) for about 30 seconds until it is yellow brown in colour.

The preparation and cooking of Yixing Zhang Roast Chicken.

Many shops in Daokou, Huaxian County, sell roast chicken.

After frying, it needs to be cooked. It is placed into a soup base which has been used many times and some salt is added together with eight different kinds of spice, like whole cardamom, lilac, amomum tsao-ko, cinnamon, ginger, dried orange peel and angelica.

The spices not only have the function of being good for the stomach, but can also get rid of bad smells, and enhance the flavour. Bring the soup to the boil and then add 12-18 gram of potassium nitrate to make the chicken's skin shiny.

Then reduce the heat until done – normally 3-5 hours. The amount of preparation and time needed to cook this dish is no less than the time needed to prepare "Mum's Old Fire Soup"!

Finally a Daokou Roast Chicken is ready. The genuine one is light red, with a slight yellowish colour. Its skin is neither broken nor split, and the meat is complete. It is a wonderful treat to be served a whole chicken.

Many shops sell roast chicken in the streets of Daokou Township, but the genuine chicken is sold at Yixing Zhang Roast Chicken Shop at 94 Hongqi Road. The shop is run by a descendant of Zhang Bing, who first tried the imperial kitchen recipe.

Photos by Shan Xiaogang
Article by Ji Ji
Translated by M.Q.

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Wang Jianjun

Qinghai Lake *is China's largest inland lake, which is surrounded by numerous beautiful scenes that cannot be found anywhere else. The community of the* **Mosuo people** *is known as "Women's Kingdom" because there, women act as household heads. However, a male photographer "intruded" into this matriarchal society and won their trust. His photographs tell us about the life of this minority ethnic group today. The* **Taihang Mountains**, *known as* **"Spine under Heaven"**, *is notoriously difficult for walkers. But one correspondent toured the section between Shanxi and Henan provinces, venturing through perilous peaks and dangerous valleys, sometimes in places where there had been no way to walk. Read how he challenged the difficulties and pushed on. Our CITY PROFILE features* **Beijing**, *the capital of 1.2 billion people. With a history of more than 3,000 years, the Chinese capital is now an international metropolis. In Beijing, you will see a grand capital, know its by-gone glory and feel its modern beat. And, by mounting the* **Great Wall**, *you will make a* **Real Man** *of yourself.*

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Festival Celebrations at Mount Liangshan

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong
Translated by Fred Huang

A saying, popular among the Yi ethnic minority, goes, "The New Year festival is a feast to the mouth, while the Torch Festival is a feast to the eye." Our trip to Butuo County (east of Xichang) in Mount Liangshan, Sichuan Province, during the Torch Festival proved the accuracy of the saying.

It was a doubly happy occasion for the people of Butuo County. Not only were they celebrating the annual Torch Festival but also the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Butuo Yi Autonomous County. Wherever we turned, we were greeted by a golden flow of yellow umbrellas shading beautifully dressed girls who paraded gracefully along the streets, as if they were models in a catwalk show. Young men stood at the roadside admiring the girls intently and quietly followed those who caught their fancy, hoping for an opportunity to start up a conversation. Romance was definitely in the air. No wonder people say the Torch Festival at Mount Liangshan is similar to the Valentine's Day.

The Day Is Too Short

Dusk had descended and it was time to light up the torches. Bonfire sites had been set up on the major streets of the county town and people gathered there with their torches. Everywhere happy, excited crowds could be seen. Some young men turned up the volume of their tape recorders and sang along at the top of their voices.

At first we simply looked on and took a few photos, but we were soon caught with the festival atmosphere. We set aside our cameras, sneaked into the crowd and joined in the *dati* dance around the bonfires to the tune of happy music. I noticed that all the guests were dancing between two Yi girls.

The celebrations lasted well into the night and as we took a walk through the streets of the town we were surprised to see young men and women chatting intently with one another, probably as a result of some of the intense looks earlier in the day. Others whispered intimately into each other's ears in the moonlight, by the river, under the trees and beside the fields. "The day is not long enough to express love so they light their torches", are the words to a song which aptly described the scene.

It is said that when Tabone, President of Malta, saw a Yi folk dance about a man chasing a woman, he said, "It seems universal in this world that men always go after the women, only the way in which they do it varies."

Only an Ox Does Not Know How to Dance

Love Chase

The next morning, the Nationalities Square was full of people from all parts of the county, clad in their Sunday best. The grand celebrations got under way with a traditional Yi dance.

The Yi people have another popular saying, "Only an ox does not know how to dance and only a piece of wood does not know how to sing." The saying serves to indicate the Yi people are brought up to be well-versed in the art of song and dance. I had already visited Mount Liangshan several times but this was the first time I was able to appreciate the many songs and dances of the Yi people. These performances, unique to Mount Liangshan, expressed gallantry in war, simulated acts of labour, demonstrated typical Yi courtship or were simply a display of their ethnic costume.

The final performance, the *dati* dance, was one that all the spectators could take part in. Surprisingly, a local friend told me the *dati* dance only appeared in the 1980s but that it had already become part of the Yi culture and a collective dance for other ethnic minorities in Southwest China.

Charge of the Bulls

After the dancing came the exciting spectacle of bull fighting. After some persuasion by their owners, the "fighters" charged into the battle field. A circle was formed around them and the crowd and photographers jostled with each other for the best view. Attendants tried to hold the crowd back for safety reasons, but to no avail. The enraged bulls began their fierce battle and were like loose cannons.

It seemed that the bulls were competing to show their strength, bravery, as well as intelligence. Very often, a subtle rolling of their eyes indicated the change of their tactics. Every now and again one bull would leap towards the crowd, making them flee in panic. Unfortunately, one bull charged into the pack of photographers. He singled out one wearing a red jacket as the target of his attack. The man ran away frantically, immediately followed by the bull. It was almost like an impromptu Spanish bull fight except that the short, fat photographer ran rather clumsily, without any trace of the brave, elegant matadors.

Goat Contests in Puge

We left Butuo and spent the night in Xichang. Early the next morning we hurried to Puge County in Tuomugou District and were amazed to find the celebrations here were held with even greater pomp and pageantry than the one we had just left. It was totally out of our expectation. The celebrations took place on a piece of flat land surrounded by mountains on all four sides. More than 20,000 Yi people draped the mountain slopes like a beautiful tapestry.

Following the bull fighting it

was the turn of the goats. Although the goat fight was less fierce than the bull fight, it was perhaps more heartrending, especially when the two goats charged at each other and clashed. Staring at each other, they pulled backward and then dashed towards each other. It was amazing that the goats seemed to understand how to use the run-up while charging at their opponents.

The audience was very much absorbed in the show. A loud gasp was heard from the crowd as one of the goats fell to the ground.

Beauty Pageant

We learned that there was to be a beauty contest held as a special event of the Puge Torch Festival.

Excitedly, several of us photographers decided to search out our own candidates for Miss Puge and began mingling around in the crowd. Whenever we came across a girl of exceptional beauty, we would take her picture and even tried to talk with her. Later we met up to discuss our favourites.

Suddenly, we saw a girl surrounded by a large crowd get into a car. We discovered that this was the chosen winner of the Miss Torch Festival. We were slightly disappointed that the event had been taking place so low-key.

Unlike those held in the large cities, the final selection in Puge County in Mount Liangshan is made by three highly respected elders who act as judges. They simply mix with the crowd and

Previous left page: Horse riders are mostly young lads.
Previous right page: Yi youths dance in their festival finery.
Left Upper: Dancing in their Sunday best (by Yang Yankang)
Left Middle: A Yi child getting ready to take part in the Torch Festival
Left Lower: Lunch on the grassland
Right Lower: Arriving for the celebrations
Above: Making-up
Below: Site of the Torch Festival in Tuomugou District, Puge County

Only a Piece of Wood Does Not Know How to Sing

observe each girl closely. There is no official entry registration, every girl is a potential candidate. The judges assess their appearance, the way they speak, how they deal with people and their behaviour.

In order to draw attention to themselves, some girls wear exceptionally eye-catching clothes and make-up. They also form themselves into small groups and hold yellow umbrellas or scarves, singing and dancing on the mountain slopes. Sometimes, as many as three winners are selected if the judges can not agree on just one; the prize is usually 30 yuan.

Horse Racing: A Totally Different Kind

Horse racing was also very popular among the Yi people in Mount Liangshan. More than 20 contestants took part in this elimination event which was different from others I had seen before. Here two riders competed in each race. They started from opposite ends of the race track, and running in the same direction, the winner was the one who first caught up with, and then overtook the other at the halfway point.

The races took a long time and on several occasions, the two contestants ran several rounds without anyone emerging as the victor. We stood in the centre of the circuit and followed the riders around and around until we felt dizzy. Finally one of the two made a mistake and fell from his horse.

Once a rider falls off, another one would quickly jump onto the horse and continue the race without it being judged a foul. Obviously it is the horse and not the rider, that is in competition. Most of the riders are in their early teens, probably related to the fact that great stamina is needed for this type of race and, of course, the horse benefited from the lighter weight of the rider.

The wrestling was even more popular and drew as many as 40 young men into the arena. Each contestant wore a tight belt which was for his opponent to grab. Both contestants tried to pull the other down. The Yi people who looked on were extremely interested in this sport and would not leave the site even when dusk had fallen. It is said that this is also an occasion for men to win the hearts of women.

Upper: Wrestling is a good occasion to display the strength of man. (by Yang Yankang)
Middle: A French photographer with a beautifully dressed Yi girl
Left: Owners injecting their goats with the fighting spirit
Right Upper: A Yi woman dressed for the beauty contest.
Right Middle: Dancing around the bonfires
Right Lower: Photographers ready to flee

Tips for Attending the Torch Festival

The Torch Festival at Mount Liangshan falls on the 24th and 25th day of the sixth month on the lunar calendar (usually in mid to late July); this date can vary ten days either side. Festival venues often change and visitors are advised to contact the county government or the Tourism Bureau of Liangshan Prefecture to find the exact location of the celebrations.

Transportation: From Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, one can take a train in the direction of Kunming or Jinjiang and alight at the town of Xichang. The journey takes between 10-12 hours. Taking approximately the same length of time, the alternative is to travel from Kunming, Yunnan Province, again by train, alighting at Xichang.

Once at Xichang, take a bus to go to Butuo County (four hours), or the county town of Puge (three hours). The bus ride between Xichang and the Tuomugou District is about one hour. Festival activities are held in more than just one location as celebrations are staged in Xichang and all the way down to districts and townships.

Accommodation: There are plenty of hotels and guesthouses in Xichang with rooms costing approximately 100 yuan a day; some charge as little as 20 to 30 yuan.

However, accommodation facilities in Butuo County are stretched during the festivals when all the hotels are fully packed and many tourists have to settle for a bed in a classroom at one of the local schools. The organisers of the festival help make accommodation arrangements and the county government can also be contacted for help.

Weather and People: The weather at Mount Liangshan is usually pleasant around the time of the festival which, for photographers, means it is fairly easy to take good colour photographs. The Yi people are very warm, hospitable and willing to be photographed especially during the festival.

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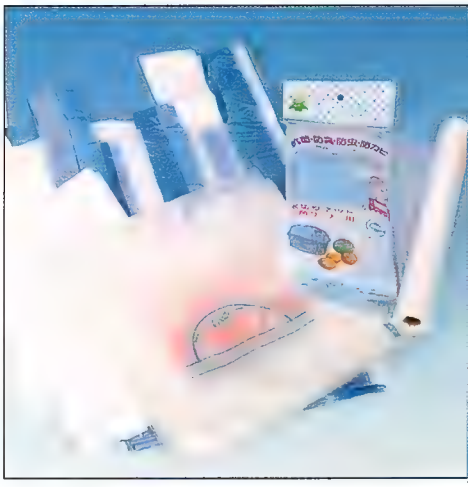

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WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!

Article by Matthew Kwok Photos by Shi Baoxu
Translated by Fred Huang

The city of Kunming enjoys a warm spring-like climate throughout the year. From December to February and even until March the following year, flocks of sea gulls fly south to this winter haven. On a business trip to China, the author had a rare opportunity to meet the sea gulls of Kunming. In fact, the birds provide local residents with an unusual leisure activity –watching and feeding them. No wonder the people of Kunming are particularly sentimental about their sea gulls and that a bond has been formed between them, as testified by the story of an old sea gull lover. —The Editor

Dear Ching:

It's been almost three weeks since I arrived in China. Although busy, my work here has been progressing smoothly. Tomorrow I leave Kunming for Shanghai.

Is the snow on Pentland Hills in Edinburgh melting? Is the wind still bitingly cold? Although it's February, the weather here is unexpectedly warm. Spring has certainly arrived. Do you still remember the time when we were lying on the grass behind the house sunbathing, you pointed at two sea gulls hovering and crowing under the blue sky and you asked me: "Shouldn't they be flying over the sea? What are they doing here?" I teased you, saying they must have lost their way and you said: "Please take me to see the sea gulls by the seaside". Well, you may feel envious if I tell you that I have run into thousands of sea gulls right here.

The hotel I am staying in is just by Cuihu (Green Lake) Park. Until today I did not notice its beauty or fascination because of the fatigue I felt from my travels and the busy schedule. Today is a holiday and most of my colleagues have gone out on a tour. I decided to take it easy in the hotel and the rest produced an unexpected close encounter with sea gulls.

The first glimpse I caught of them was from the third floor balcony at the hotel, which I learned was the best place from which to watch the birds. I got up at 8:30, thinking I was an early riser, but the balcony was already packed with tourists. Someone threw some bread into the water below and a sea gull dashed straight to it, picking it up before it became soaked. I thought it would immediately fly off, but instead it hovered several metres above the water's surface, flapping its wings to steady itself and preparing to make another dash. The second piece of bread came down and this time several birds went in for the kill. Gradually, the pieces of bread multiplied, attracting more hungry sea gulls. Some were in such a hurry that they did not wait for the bread to land in the water, they simply intercepted it mid air. Then they made a quick U-turn and charged after more. Several times, sea gulls flew at lightening speeds and snatched up the bread from the water, splashing up trails of water behind them which fell in arcs like diamond necklaces. Though such scenes lasted

Xing Yi

The sea gulls on the lake resemble ducks relaxing.

only briefly, it was an exceptionally beautiful sight. Sometimes one or two sea gulls got spooked and the entire flock took off together, circling in the sky, darting left or right in every direction. In unison they performed amazing flying stunts with the utmost precision. Do I sound as if I'm exaggerating? Unfortunately I did not bring my camcorder with me on this trip, otherwise I would have recorded what I saw to amaze you with it.

After lunch, I left the hotel to get some fresh air. As I turned onto the East Wind Square, I found more sea gulls on the Panlong River which meanders around the square and the streets nearby. People were feeding the sea gulls and taking pictures of them just like

People, old and young, find special pleasure in feeding the sea gulls.

visitors to Trafalgar Square in London. What surprised me was that as the number of people in the square increased, so did the number of sea gulls. Were these creatures afraid of humans? With my broken standard Chinese, I talked with a local person and learned that the friendship between the people of Kunming and the sea gulls was established more than 20 years ago. At that time, the red-beaked sea gulls came south from Siberia to winter in Kunming. Finding the spring-like weather here, they have been returning every year since. The local people, with a strong awareness of environmental protection, not only love the birds but feed them, which makes the birds return year after year. Then why did the birds not come to Kunming before 1984? The question bothered me but the man only answered humorously: "I really don't know. I haven't asked the sea gulls that question yet."

A car drove by suddenly, scaring the feeding birds and sending them off. Just then I had the urge to feed the sea gulls too. So I bought some bread from a hawker and tried to feed the birds together with the local people. You know, I have never owned any animals or pets. At the beginning I really did not know what to do, so I just left the bread on the ground and let the birds help themselves. I watched a boy standing next to me. He confidently held the bread in his hand and the sea gulls alighted on his small hand, picking at the bread. Obviously he had done this before. I was not going to show my weakness, so I also held the bread in my hand. But when the first sea gull came I got scared and pulled back my hand.The bread dropped to the ground. I really felt that was a loss of face, so I plucked up my courage and once again held the bread in my hand. A sea gull came and skilfully picked at the bread. I had done it! More birds came and my confidence increased.

Feeding the sea gulls from a rocking boat is a unique experience.

My dear, I had never seen sea gulls at such close range. They are not big, just about double the size of a pigeon and when they spread their wings, the width is more than two feet. These birds are much smaller than the ones we saw in Edinburgh. The locals call them "red-beaked sea gulls", but I found their beaks and claws orange red. This, plus their snow white feathers tinged with grey, dark eyes and black rings around their eyes make them look absolutely lovely. Suddenly the motor of a car was heard and a sea gull, which was about to lift the bread from my hand, took off. Its claws and beak reflected in the sunlight, looked like semi-transparent red jade stones. The sight filled me with a wonderful feeling.

I had heard that sea gulls could also be seen at Dianchi Lake – an extremely beautiful sight in Kunming. So I headed towards the Grand View Tower looking down at the lake. As I walked along, I listened to the tapes you gave me for my walkman. The music from the tape and the movements I saw all round me combined to create something like a live movie. When I got onto the Grand View Tower, my eyes were greeted by a lake the size of a sea. With fewer tourists, the number of sea gulls here was much smaller than at the Green Lake and the East Wind Square, which gave this place a special charm. Sea gulls flew and soared to their hearts' content. Sometimes, one or two departed from the flock and flew back and forth over the lake. I wondered whether they were looking for food or just joy-riding on the air currents. Here I became mesmerised and the sun had set before I could realise it. The silhouette of several sea gulls appeared in the orange sky, creating a romantic sight. From the earphones, I heard the deep, resonant voice of veteran singer Louis Armstrong. I could not help humming along to the tune of What a Wonderful World!

At this very moment, I am writing to you from my hotel room. Outside the Green Lake is a world of darkness with sparse dim lights. The sea gulls are nowhere to be seen. My dear, please forgive me for having been unable to take you to see the sea gulls, but let me introduce them to you with this letter....

Love,

Matthew

Green Lake Park has more sea gulls than anywhere else in Kunming.

The Story of an Old Man and the Sea Gulls

"Coming! I am coming! Single Foot, Sand Gull and Grey Head.... It's feeding time." The voice of this old man talking to his sea gulls had been heard at Green Lake in Kunming for 11 winters and springs.

Seventy-one-year-old Wu Qingheng had retired from a factory in 1984 where he once built houses and repaired furnaces. He never married nor did he have any close relatives. When he retired, it coincidentally happened to be the first year that a flock of red-beaked sea gulls came to Green Lake for the winter. From then on, his life in retirement became closely linked with the sea gulls. For 11 years, he lived frugally but went to the lake every day, rain or shine. To him, the sea gulls were like his children. He gave them names and took special care of them if they became injured or sick. As time went by, the sea gulls came to regard him as one of them. Whenever he arrived, they would gather around him. While he fed them biscuits and home-made steamed buns, they showed off their flying skills for him. At such times, the old man felt satisfied. He would call those sea gulls he knew well to his side and talk to them while they picked food from his hand. The old man would not allow anyone to harm the birds. In fact I once saw him angrily scolding someone who tried to catch a sea gull. His special love and devotion to the birds earned him the nickname "Old Sea Gull Man".

Saying "good-bye" to the old man

One afternoon I went to the lake side to look for the familiar figure with a cloth bag over his shoulder and a plastic bag in his hand, but he was not there. I remembered that a week ago he had told me he'd had a cold and was not feeling well. He said that all he had eaten in the past two days was a bowl of noodles and that he wanted to go home early. After several inquiries, I found the factory where he'd once worked and learned from his former colleagues that he had died the previous day. At his home, I fully realised just how frugally the old man had lived in order to feed the sea gulls. Apart from a few cooking utensils, all he owned was his bedding. His neighbour, Mr. Bao, sighed and told us: "Mr. Wu spent all his money on the sea gulls. Each day he would walk for almost 20 kilometres to Green Lake to feed the sea gulls. He would never buy himself anything nice to eat, but everyday he would buy half a kilo of biscuits for the birds. When he had no money, he would make food for the sea gulls with eggs and corn.

"The night before he died," Bao continued, " Mr. Wu said to me that he was soon leaving this world but he did not want to part with the sea gulls. He wished he had taken some pictures of the birds so that he could take them with him and he also would like to see the places where sea gulls slept.

I recalled what Master Wu had told me: "Two years ago an especially large sea gull with a crest on its head came to Kunming. It alighted on my head five times. Sea gulls understand people and it was bidding me goodbye. Since then, I have never seen it again...." When the old man told me this, tears welled up in his eyes as he stared at the sea gulls on the lake.

Two days later, a group of photographers held a memorial service for the Old Sea Gull Man and placed a photograph measuring 24 inches showing him feeding the sea gulls. Local people from Green Lake had signed it. To our great surprise, sea gulls came and lined up in neat formation in front of the photograph as if guarding it. More sea gulls flew over, hovering in the air, seemingly looking at the old man or displaying their flying skills. All the while they took no notice of us strangers. Then, as we started to walk away with the picture, they suddenly became restless and screeched at the top of their voices as if crying out for the old man.

The Old Sea Gull Man is gone, but his story lives on and is related among the people at the lake. His photograph now hangs in a studio where it can be viewed by anyone who is interested.

Article by Li Zhixiong

Tips for Sea Gulls Watching in Kunming

Located in the Central Yunnan Basin, Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province lies 1,894 metres above sea level. The average daily temperature is 15°C, giving the city a spring-like weather all year round. The temperate climate is made possible by its geographical location – the Hengduan Mountains and the East Yunnan Highlands ward off the cold air currents from the north while warm air currents flow in from northern India. These currents help keep Kunming warm in winter. In summer, warm, damp air currents from the Bay of Bengal and Tonkin Bay ensure adequate rainfall and keep the weather pleasant.

Because of these favourable climatic and geographical conditions, thousands of red-beaked sea gulls migrate to Kunming from Siberia. They stay from December to February the following year drawing thousands of visitors each year who love to watch their aerobatics and take great delight in feeding them. The sea gulls have become a welcome added attraction for tourists as well as providing a pleasant past-time for the locals.

Location

The sea gulls mostly congregate in following areas:

Cuihu (Green Lake) Park: The majority of the red-beaked sea gulls flock together here.

East Wind Square: The second most popular site for sea gulls. What makes this place special is the sight of large flocks of sea gulls in an urban environment.

Daguanlou (Grand View Tower) Park: Although there are not as many sea gulls here the park is situated beside the Dianchi Lake and the view across the lake is better.

Ethnic Culture Village: On Dianchi Lake, the place has a wide and spacious water surface and a fairly large number of sea gulls.

Baiyukou (White Fish Mouth): Although situated away from the heart of Kunming city, tourists are fewer and so are the sea gulls but the expanse of water is greater, making it a tranquil setting in which to watch the sea gulls in free and graceful flight.

Transportation

Except White Fish Mouth, all the sea gull watching spots are located not far from Kunming city centre. They can be reached by bus, bicycle or by foot. To get to White Fish Mouth, take a half hour bus ride from the city centre.

Protection of the Birds

Although the Kunming City government has not yet established punishable laws banning the killing of sea gulls, it has issued several announcements in order to protect the birds: harming, scaring, capturing or killing sea gulls are all frowned upon.

Tourists can feed the birds, usually with bread or small fish which must be fresh. At several of the sites many stores sell bread for feeding the sea gulls. A bag costs between two or three yuan.

Watching sea gulls at White Fish Mouth

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Art School Opens, Beijing

Xu Beihong Middle School opened recently in Beijing in honour of Xu Beihong, the famous Chinese painter and teacher of fine arts (1895-1953). Liao Jingwen, widow of the artist and their son Xu Qingping will hold the positions of honorary master and master respectively. The aim of the school, which already has 250 students, is to give more importance to art education than other ordinary middle schools.

Rare Birds Reserve

An increasing number of tourists are heading for a nature reserve in Xining, Qinghai Province to get a look at the rare black-necked cranes. The 30-square-kilometre Longbaotan Nature Reserve is home to a dozen rare birds, including bar-headed geese and brown-headed gulls.

Shanghai's Subway

Digging has begun recently on a tunnel for Shanghai's second subway line. The 13.6-kilometre new subway running from Jing'ansi in the city centre to Longdong Road in Pudong New Development Area will have 10 stations along its route. Shanghai's first subway was constructed with city government funding, but the new line is to be jointly funded by the city government and local governments in the districts through which the subway will pass.

New Air Route

Since October, China East Airline Co. has begun to operate a new air route from Yantai (Shangdong Province) to Hong Kong with two weekly flights on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Yantai airport currently operates 100 flights a week and annually handles 650,000 passengers.

Imperial Archives

China's oldest imperial archives have survived 400 years and are being hailed by Chinese archivists as a model for record keeping. Located on the eastern side of the prestigious Forbidden City, Huang Shi Cheng, the imperial archives of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, collected the records, imperial edicts and imperial genealogies of the emperors. Important documents, such as copies of the Yongle Encyclopaedia, China's first encyclopaedia, the Compendia of Qing Law, and the collection of the imperial general seals were also held in the archives.

As opposed to the halls of the Forbidden City, which are constructed of wood, Huang Shi Cheng was made completely of stone with no beams or pillars supporting its arched roof. Archivists say the design and craftsmanship of the archives helped to protect the files from fire, damp, worms and rot.

Earliest Form of Paper

An irregularly shaped piece of linen has been claimed by Chinese experts as the earliest example of paper yet found in the world. Their finding indicates that China's paper-making history may have begun 200 years earlier than is generally accepted.

The palm-sized piece of paper was exhibited during the 13th International Congress on Archives in Beijing. It was unearthed from the ruins of an ancient staging post in Dunhuang in Northwest China's Gansu Province. It is just one example of paper extant from China's Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D.24). Along with several piles of blank paper, a piece of paper with 30 Chinese characters written in an ancient style of calligraphy characteristic of the Western Han Dynasty was also discovered.

Xinjiang to Expand Railway

Construction has begun on a key part of the railway line in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The current 495-kilometre railway line between Turpan and Korla opened in 1984 and plays a vital role in exploiting petroleum and gas resources in the Tarim Basin and in boosting economic growth in southern Xinjiang. The new 975-kilometre stretch will link Korla with Kashi in the west. The project is expected to take three and a half years. When completed, the total length of the railway will stretch for 1,470 kilometres.

Courtyard Gallery, Beijing

The Courtyard, an art gallery which will open at the beginning of December this year, has set itself the task of being the leading art gallery in China by showing a broad range of contemporary Chinese art with a special focus on oil paintings. It is to be situated in a unique location directly across from the East Gate of the Forbidden City in a traditional courtyard house that was originally part of the imperial palace. In fact, the west wing of the gallery is constructed from the original wall of the ancient moat that encircles the heart of the palace precinct.

Qiantang Tidal Wave

Watching the spectacular Qiantang tidal wave is an annual event in East China's Zhejiang Province. One million tourists from across China and 10,000 from overseas attended the event this year which ran from September 28 to October 2.

Inter-Continental Expands

The hotel and resort chain, Inter-Continental has added four hotels to its growing network in China:

Tianlun Dynasty Hotel, Beijing (a Global Partner hotel) Located in Wangfujing Avenue in Beijing's commercial zone.

Huiquan Dynasty, Qingdao Situated on the beach front, a short walk from Qingdao's business district.

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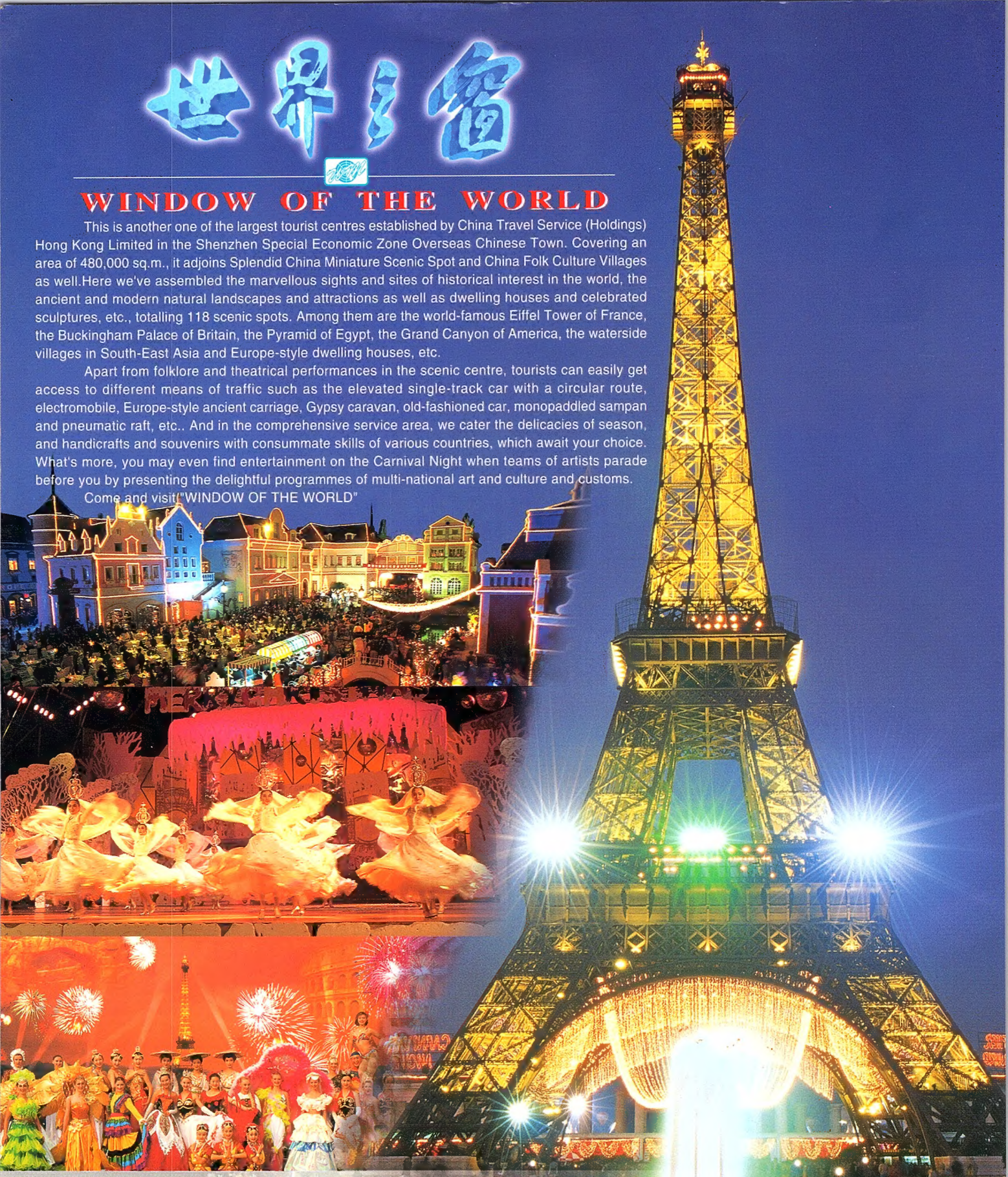

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